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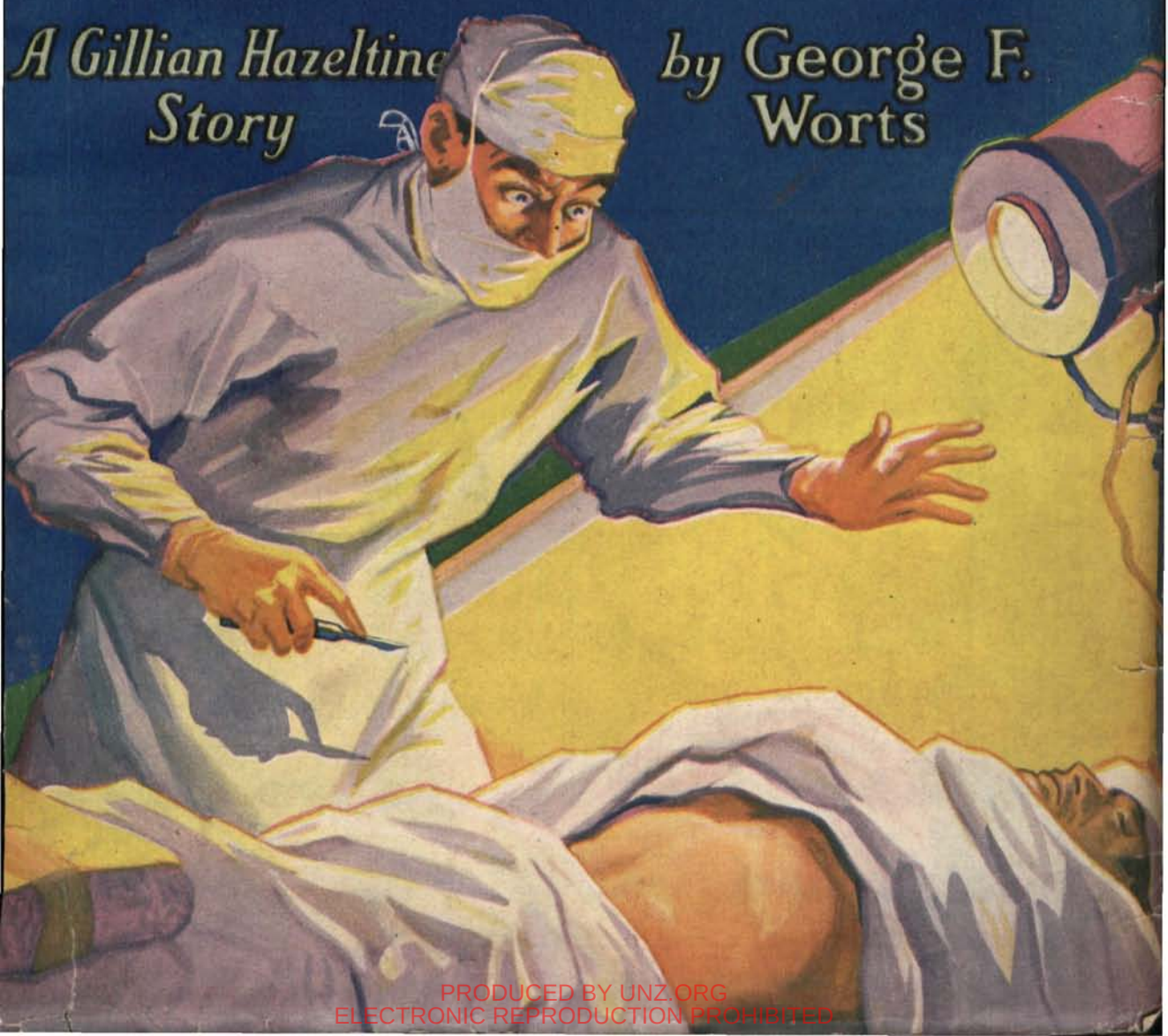

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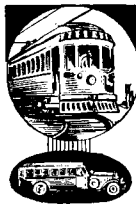

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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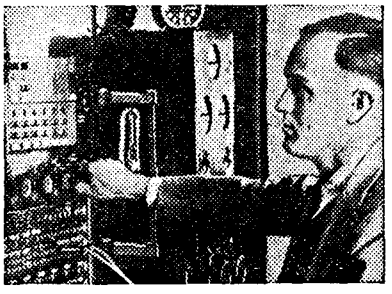

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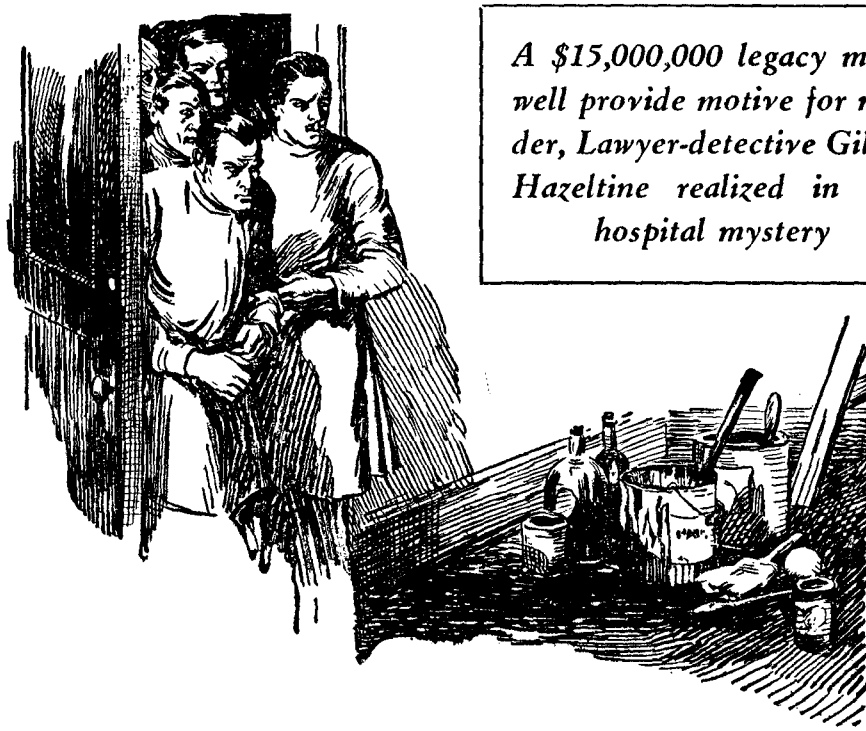

A $15,000,000 legacy might well provide motive for murder, Lawyer-detective Gillian Hazeltine realized in that hospital mystery

Murder—In Some Degree

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "The Monster of the Lagoon," "The Mystery of the Five Bald Men," etc.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE AIRPORT.

WHEN the evening passenger plane from New York, thundering into a black gale, finally arrived at the Greenfield airport, it dropped one of its passengers into the very heart of a romantic mystery. The passenger was Gillian Hazeltine, the famous—or infamous—criminal lawyer, whose business was mysteries. Yet his interest in them was not wholly professional. He loved to shake the truth out of a baffling situation as a terrier loves to shake the life out of a rat.

Alighting from the big monoplane, tired and stiff from the rough passage, the lawyer walked briskly into the administration building. He intended to telephone his wife, who was not at all air-minded, that he had arrived safely.

The lobby was crowded. Passengers from his ship were filing through it. Passengers were being assembled for another ship due out shortly. Friends and relatives were greeting or saying good-by to friends and relatives. Porters were trotting about with suitcases. Airport employees were busy at the desk, making out tickets, answering questions, weighing in luggage.

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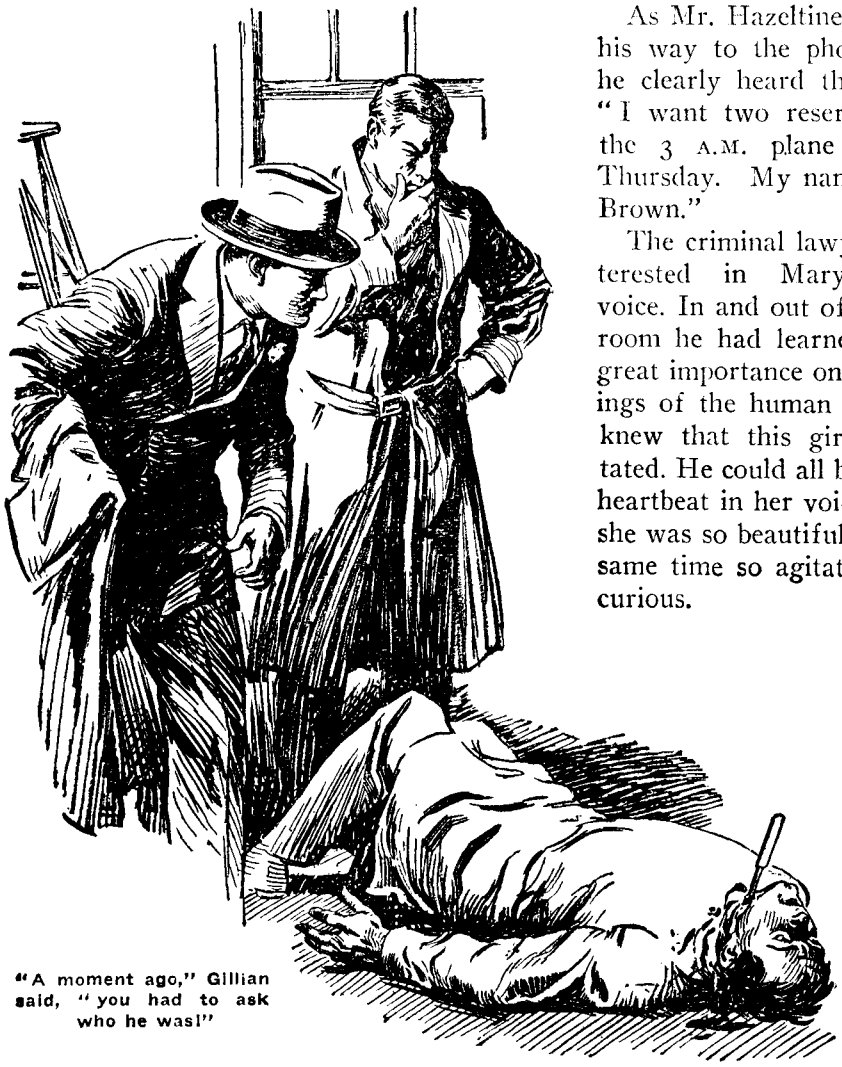

"A moment ago," Gillian said, "you had to ask who he was!"

As Mr. Hazeltine passed, on his way to the phone booths, he clearly heard the girl say, "I want two reservations on the 3 A.M. plane to Dallas Thursday. My name is Mary Brown."

The criminal lawyer was interested in Mary Brown's voice. In and out of the courtroom he had learned to place great importance on tone shadings of the human voice. He knew that this girl was agitated. He could all but hear the heartbeat in her voice. Because she was so beautiful and at the same time so agitated, he was curious.

One of the brisk young men behind the counter was attending to a girl so exceptionally beautiful that Hazeltine's glance steadied to a sparkling gaze of appreciation.

She was a little thing, slim and very Irish—the Dublin type of Irish—with curling black hair under a pert little hat, deep blue eyes with fine thick upcurling lashes that needed no mascara, a rosebloom complexion, and a small red mouth that was, in profile, charming.

He went to the phone booths, of which there were three. Two were occupied, with their glass-panelled doors closed. The nearest was empty. He went in, dropped a nickel in the slot, and dialed the number of his house. He did not close the door. Some recent occupant had evidently been smoking a pipe loaded with horsehair.

Through the open door the lawyer commanded a full view of the ticket office, including an intriguing rear view of Mary Brown. She had small,

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trim feet and delicate, shapely ankles. Her blue dress fitted her slender figure neatly.

From any view, she afforded a masculine eye pleasure.

The man in the phone booth saw her open her purse and give money in exchange for two long green tickets. And at this point the mystery began. In the crowd about the door which gave upon the tarmac a face suddenly stood out—the pale, handsome face of a young man with sharp black eyes and a neatly trimmed black mustache. He was further distinguished by a jagged scar, several shades paler than his skin, which zigzagged upward from the inner corner of his left eye to the line of his thick black hair. He wore no hat.

The scar made his face striking and slightly sinister. And Gillian Hazeltine was aware that Mary Brown, in the act of turning from the desk and stuffing the two green tickets into her purse, had seen the young man, too.

In an impulsive gesture she clutched the purse to her heart with both hands. She stared across the crowd at the man with the scar, then she looked wildly about her. She turned and started impetuously for the phone booths. She evidently saw the open door of the lawyer's booth, but did not immediately see that it contained a lawyer. She bolted for it. When she saw that it was occupied, she hesitated, but only for a moment.

She panted, "I've got to hide! Quick! Let me in here!"

She darted in past him and crouched at the back of the booth. At that moment the measured buzzing in the receiver ended, and Gillian Hazeltine's Japanese houseman said in his precise English, "Gillian Hazeltine's residence."

"One moment, Toro," the lawyer gasped.

The tall young man with the interesting scar strode past the booth without glancing at it and vanished in the direction of the doors to the parking area.

THE girl hiding behind Mr. Hazeltine gave a tremulous gasp, then huskily breathed, "Thank God!" It was the only explanation she made.

With no word of thanks or apology, she wriggled past the lawyer and walked rapidly, with a sharp clicking of her little high heels, toward the door that opened on the tarmac. She vanished into the night, leaving Gillian Hazeltine a faint breath of some springtime perfume to remember her by.

He now asked Toro for Mrs. Hazeltine, and was presently telling her that he had landed safely and would take a taxicab home. He was curious about the beautiful Mary Brown. He had glimpsed a mystery that had neither beginning nor end, but only the haunting wisp of a middle. But it was obviously a mystery that hinted merely at romance—at intrigue of a sort that involved jealous suitors, a beautiful lady and possibly an elopement.

Absorbed as he was by any mystery, he would soon have forgotten the delicious Miss Brown and the moment of exciting intimacy they had shared in a phone booth, if she had not shortly come to his attention under even more mystifying circumstances.

On the second afternoon following the airport episode Dr. Hobart Creed telephoned him at his office and urgently requested his presence at dinner that evening.

"Some baffling things have come up

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that I want to consult you about, Gillian," Dr. Creed said. "Cocktails at seven."

Gillian Hazeltine would have broken almost any engagement to keep this one, for Dr. Hobart Creed was, in his opinion, one of the greatest men alive. The Hobart Creed Hospital was the largest not only in the city but in the State. Sufferers from maladies of every description from all parts of the country, and from as far away as Europe, Asia, and Australia, came to be diagnosed, treated, and operated on.

The Hobart Creed Hospital was really an amazing institution. Hobart Creed had started his professional life as a poor but ambitious general practitioner. He had been dissatisfied with the hospitals of the time. When he became successful as a surgeon, he started his own hospital. He was now almost ninety. In fifty years his hospital had grown until it now occupied an entire city block and part of another—a great orderly mass of white stone buildings, housing hundreds of patients—and the most modern equipment known to surgical and medical science.

Although his income was tremendous, he was not a rich man. Over those fifty years his income had gone back into his hospital—into one of the largest and finest clinics in the world, into the finest operating rooms that money could build, into such costly items as radium and the most powerful and delicate X-ray machines that electrical engineers could devise, and into the hiring of specialists who were outstanding in their fields.

In this hospital he had realized every doctor's and surgeon's ideal. It was perfection. It was a living monument to one of the world's greatest of great men. And it was, to its creator and owner, a child, a passion, an obsession.

DR. CREED'S house was a small, very modest white stone building not far from the hospital. One servant, an old Frenchman, known affectionately to the doctor's friends as Pompom, attended to his needs.

Pompom opened the door that evening to Gillian Hazeltine, and ushered him into the book-lined study where the great surgeon was waiting.

Dr. Creed put down a cigar and a thick book, and got up, heartily welcoming his guest, crisply giving orders to Pompom, creating in a matter of seconds an atmosphere of genial hospitality.

"We won't talk about my troubles until after dinner, Gillian," the old man said. "If you want to live forever, never worry at mealtimes. If everybody kept laughing through every meal, there wouldn't be stomach trouble."

His eyes were sparkling, his face, even his bald dome, was flushed. With his fringe of white hair, his little white spike of a chin whisker, he looked so happy, so hugely satisfied with life and himself, that Gillian laughed.

Dr. Creed was one of the most amazing personalities he had ever known, anyhow. Verging on ninety, he looked, perhaps, sixty-five. And his mind was as clear, as vigorous as that of a man of half that age. Slim, of medium height, he carried himself with the erectness of a drill sergeant. Invariably he told reporters who interviewed him that the secret of his success was laughter.

"Men take themselves too seriously. They worry too much. They poison

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themselves grieving over what never happens. Laughter would empty every hospital in the world!"

Pompom arrived with cocktails—perfect Daiquiris. The two men went into the doctor's small but famous dining room—a gourmand's paradise. They dined and laughed and drank fine vintage wines. And over their brandy, cigars and black coffee Dr. Creed said suddenly, "Gillian, I'm getting old. The old machine is wearing out. I've had the valves ground, the cylinders re-bored, and new spark plugs put in for the last time. I'm nothing but an eighty-seven-year-old pile of junk. I've had myself X-rayed and prodded and probed by the best men on my staff. My time's almost up."

Gillian made protesting noises.

Dr. Creed held up the sensitive, delicate fingers of his right hand. "That long."

"Five years?" the lawyer gasped.

"Months! Don't argue with me. I'm not complaining. I never complain. Name me one man my age who's had more fun out of life than I have!"

Gillian began to puff angrily at his cigar.

The old man said, "I wanted to talk to you tonight about my will. You won't approve of it. You'll say I'm mentally unfit—but you'd better not try to prove it in court! I'm a bachelor. I haven't a living relative, thank God. The only love I've ever had has been this hospital. It's the most modern, the best equipped, the best running hospital on earth. If it isn't, it ought to be."

DR. CREED frowned and contemplated Gillian mysteriously over the end of his cigar. "My will is going to be a peculiar will. Gillian, I'm going to bequeath my hospital—the whole works—to the man who is in charge on the day of my death. Go on! Say it!"

Gillian said thoughtfully, "Eccentric—perhaps a little dangerous."

Dr. Creed chortled. "It might give you a brand new motive for a murder, eh?"

"Who is the fortunate fellow?"

"A brilliant young surgeon named Dan Starbuck—perhaps the cleverest abdominal man in America."

Gillian nodded. He had heard of Dan Starbuck.

The old man said, "I'll tell you about him in due course. What I want your advice and help on is a mystery—a baffling and sinister mystery! My hospital has suddenly become demoralized. It's haywire!"

"You just said it's the smoothest running hospital on earth."

"I said it ought to be. It isn't. There is something going on under cover. I know the pulse of this institution as well as I ever knew the pulse of a patient. It's skipping beats."

"Specifically, what has happened?"

"Mysterious things—and mistakes. Bad mistakes. The *esprit de corps* is gone. The newest little probationer feels it. Specifically, there have been three mysterious occurrences. They began about a month ago."

"Are you sure of this date?" Gillian asked.

"Yes, quite sure. It was just about a month ago that cocaine began vanishing from the dispensary. We've had narcotic thefts before, but never so clever, never so systematic. I'm convinced it's an inside job. The next item is—a mystery woman! She visited Dan Starbuck's room late at night—and got drunk there."

"Is that so mysterious?" Gillian smiled.

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"You'll think so when you hear the rest of it," the old man answered. "The surgeon's rooms are in the top floor of a wing off the main operating building. Women are not permitted on that floor. One morning at about two o'clock I was hailed by an orderly in one of the lower floors of the building."

"Is it your custom," Gillian interrupted, "to visit the hospital at such hours?"

"It's my custom to prowl about any and all of these buildings at all hours. I was stopped by this orderly. He's a prim, old-maidish fellow who's been on my payroll for fifteen years. He told me he thought I ought to know that he had seen a woman, a very flashily dressed woman, go into Dan Starbuck's room about two hours previously. She was evidently a beautiful showgirl type of blonde.

GILLIAN HAZELTINE

"I went at once to Dan Starbuck's quarters. I was doubtful, because Dan Starbuck is not the kind to entertain women in his room—or to violate any of the hospital rules. Outside the door I met Dr. Steffens, one of my older surgeons. He was very much upset. He told me that he had just seen a woman—a beautiful blonde — leave Starbuck's room. What are you grinning about?"

"It doesn't seem so mysterious to me."

"Wait a minute. The mystery is coming. I went into Starbuck's room. I turned on the light. There was an empty gin bottle and two glasses on the table. And in Starbuck's bed was not Starbuck but Dr. Hoyle, one of my best anæsthetists, sound asleep. I had a hard time waking him. He had not even seen this woman. At a little before eleven he had dropped in for a chat with Starbuck. Hoyle had been overworking and could not sleep. In Starbuck's presence he took a pretty stiff dose of luminol, and his last recollection was talking to Starbuck. Starbuck walked out and left him sleeping there."

"Where was Starbuck?"

"Over at Bellevue Hospital, on an emergency case. He was at Bellevue from a little past eleven until almost three. What do you make of that?"

"Do you believe Dr. Hoyle's story?"

"Implicitly!"

"There was no chance, in your mind, of Dr. Hoyle's having staged this little rendezvous in Starbuck's room, knowing Starbuck would be gone for some time?"

"But he didn't know Starbuck was going. It was an emergency call! Now—what was that woman doing in that room? What was behind it all?"

GILLIAN puffed frowningly at his cigar. "There's something curiously familiar about this," he murmured. "The woman was never seen again, of course. And no one who

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saw her—either the orderly or Dr. Steffens—recognized her."

"No."

"And neither Starbuck nor Hoyle recognized her from your description?"

"No. Any more questions?"

"Nope. Go on."

"The next—and latest—mysterious occurrence happened this morning. It prompted me to call you in. Do you know what a hemophiliac is?"

Gillian shook his head.

"Hemophilia is a strange malady—an inherited weakness—about which medical science still knows very little. Perhaps the best known cases are the male members of the Spanish royal family.

"A hemophiliac is a bleeder. Once a hemophiliac starts bleeding, there's no stopping him."

"How does he ever grow up?"

"Only through amazing luck or by the exercise of the utmost care. Certain serum injections are helpful."

"Wouldn't the slightest scratch be fatal?"

"It might. About a week ago, one of these strange cases came here for observation—a young man of twenty-four—to see what we could do for what appeared to be chronic appendicitis. It was not known that he was a bleeder. It was decided to operate. Dan Starbuck—"

"Ah," Gillian breathed. "Dan Starbuck again."

"This morning at eleven, Starbuck was to operate. The bleeder went to the laboratory for the usual routine of a blood test. Then a slip-up occurred—a very mysterious slip-up."

"Don't tell me," Gillian protested in horror, "he was operated on by mistake!"

"He was."

"But didn't Starbuck—"

"Wait. The laboratory technician took the blood test and found at once that the young man was a hemophiliac. He stopped the hemorrhage from the patient's finger with an injection, as it is possible to do when the flow is small.

"The technician sent the bleeder back to his room, and dispatched his assistant with a report to Starbuck.

"Starbuck was not in his office. She placed it on his desk with the patient's chart, which Starbuck would consult, as a matter of routine, immediately before the operation. In the meantime Operating Room B was ready, the patient was prepared by his nurse, and at eleven o'clock Dan Starbuck appeared, and—operated on the bleeder. The poor devil died on the table, of course."

"Starbuck claims," Gillian guessed, "that the report was not placed on his desk until *after* the operation!"

"Exactly!"

"And what does the technician's assistant say?"

"That she placed it on his desk *before* the operation!"

"Whom do you believe?"

"Both of them. Some one must have removed the chart before the operation and returned it afterward."

Gillian said thoughtfully, "Did he examine this hemophiliac before operating?"

"No. It wasn't necessary. This is a very large hospital. Much of his operating is upon patients he has never seen. He takes the diagnoses of other doctors whose specialty is diagnosis—and operates accordingly."

"Didn't the patient make any protest against being operated on?"

"He did. He was hysterical—incoherent. He had to be strapped to the

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table. But many people become hysterical before an operation."

GILLIAN shook his head.

"Doctor, would you say it might have been negligence on Starbuck's part?"

"I would not! He is never negligent," the old man said testily; and Gillian realized that, whatever might be said on the subject, Dr. Creed idolized the young surgeon and would hear no ill of him.

"I want you to go in there," Dr. Creed said unexpectedly, "and sift this mystery to the bottom! All these mysteries!"

"But I know nothing about hospitals," Gillian protested. "You might as well send me to Africa to find out, in a few minutes, why the war drums are beating and the battle fires burning."

"Ah, you're modest, Gillian—but clever. Damn your modesty! What I want is your cleverness."

Gillian laughed. "I've never been inside the doors of your hospital."

"All the better. You'll be unprejudiced. And you won't go at it blind. I'll be with you every step of the way. First of all, I want you to size up Dan Starbuck."

"The man," Gillian said dreamily, "who inherits the Hobart Creed Hospital, lock, stock and barrel. A property worth, at a conservative estimate, fifteen millions."

"And worthy of it!" the old man declared.

"And you wonder," Gillian went on in the same dreamy manner, "why your hospital is haywire, why the *esprit de corps* is shot, and why attempts are being made to discredit Dan Starbuck!"

Dr. Creed leaned forward and pointed a finger at the lawyer. "That's just where you're wrong. No one knows about it! He doesn't know about it. You're the first person I've mentioned it to. No one can possibly suspect that I'm making him my heir."

Gillian raised an eyebrow. His steel-blue eyes were alive with little fires. "That makes it harder," he admitted. "But since I'm your lawyer and you are paying me for my advice, you'll get my honest opinion. I think it's a great risk to leave this valuable property to one man. Why not establish a foundation—name a directorate of responsible business men and hard-boiled doctors who will do their utmost to carry out your wishes to the letter?"

"Nothing stirring," the old man chirped. "Petty politics would soon enter into it. I don't believe in the committee system of running a hospital. I've proved that a one-man hospital can be—must be—the most successful."

"The trouble is," Gillian argued, "you'll never find another Hobart Creed."

Dr. Creed laughed. "You haven't met Dan Starbuck!" he cried. "He combines, to my utmost satisfaction, every quality I've wanted in my successor. You won't find his equal in ten thousand doctors!"

At this point Pompom entered the dining room.

"Dr. Starbuck is on the phone, doctor," the plump little Frenchman said. "He says it is urgent."

Dr. Creed went out of the room.

When he returned, in a moment, his eyes were glinting and his face was flushed with excitement.

"Another mystery!" he cried.

"With Dan Starbuck at the bottom of it?"

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"No, no. One of the nurses. She just saw a ghost!"

"Now, doctor."

"She swears it. She fainted. They're just bringing her around. Come on!"

The two men left the house and went to the great stone-and-glass cube which housed the operating rooms and some hundreds of patients.

CHAPTER II.

WHERE IS THE GHOST?

AN immense noiseless elevator whisked the two men to the ninth floor. Dr. Creed took Gillian down a corridor to an open door from which light streamed and the murmurs of voices issued. It proved to be Dr. Starbuck's office.

A pale girl with platinum-blond hair was stretched out on her back on a divan at one end of the room. A group of three people stood near a flat walnut desk. Two were men, the third was a young woman—a handsome young woman—with bright red hair.

The girl on the settee had one arm thrown over her eyes, but she did not stir when Dr. Creed said heartily, "Ghosts now, eh? Well, we'll soon get at the bottom of all this mystery." And he added in the triumphant voice of a toastmaster introducing the speaker of the evening, "This is Gillian Hazeltine!"

Then he grasped one of the young men by the arm, and said, with an air of pride, "Gillian, this—this is Dan Starbuck."

Gillian shook hands with the young man, and guessed his age at thirty. There was nothing remarkable about Dr. Starbuck's appearance. Of a little more than the average height, he looked to Gillian like a typical surgeon—clear-eyed, healthy and crisp. His hair was blond, and he had the tan of a golfer. He was dressed in a white operating gown, as was the woman with red hair.

"We're beginning to wonder, Mr. Hazeltine," the famous young surgeon said, "whether this is a hospital or a haunted house."

An expert at judging people, Gillian decided, after one shrewd, appraising glance, that Dan Starbuck was all that old Dr. Creed had claimed for him. That he was a great surgeon, Gillian had not doubted, but now he was convinced also that Starbuck was a fine young man, and a person to be trusted.

Dr. Creed now introduced Gillian to the red-haired woman. She was very good looking. Her name, it appeared, was Dr. Claudia Barnum.

"Dr. Barnum," Dr. Creed explained, "is Dr. Starbuck's assistant, and one of the most brilliant surgeons on our staff."

Dr. Barnum held out her hand, and Gillian saw that she had not removed her rubber operating-room gloves. The glove felt smooth and powdery, but he could feel the firm, warm flesh through it.

"Nurse Green," she said, "won't be able to talk for a moment. The poor child had quite a shock."

Gillian liked the woman surgeon's voice. It was serene and musical. He was now intoduced to the third member of the trio, a young man slightly taller than Dr. Starbuck. He had crisp black hair, whimsical eyes and a friendly grin. His handshake was hearty.

"This is Dr. Hoyle," Dr. Creed explained, "our chief anæsthetist. We consider him the greatest anæsthetist in America."

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"You mean," Dr. Starbuck said, "he does."

Dr. Hoyle, grinning, remarked, "And a bogey man who goes around scaring poor little nurses in my spare time."

"Nonsense!" the red-headed woman surgeon laughed. "You weren't anywhere around."

The tall young anæsthetist looked at her lovingly and said, "Thank you for that alibi, Claudia. I may need it."

"Aren't you the man," Gillian asked him, "who was asleep in Dr. Starbuck's room the night the beautiful and mysterious blonde polished off that quart of gin?"

"I am always asleep," Dr. Hoyle answered, "when young and beautiful women come looking for adventure. When Nurse Green fainted—whose arms did she fall into? Mine? Not at all. Dr. Starbuck's! I am always just too late—usually a block or two away—when beautiful women faint."

DR. HOBART CREED

THERE was a groan from the settee. Nurse Green had removed the hand from her eyes, and was staring up dazedly at them.

"Do you feel well enough to talk?" Dr. Starbuck asked crisply.

"I will in a moment," the girl whispered, smiling up at him sweetly.

She had, Gillian observed, large and beautiful blue eyes. She was strikingly pretty, in a sharp, sophisticated way.

"We had just finished an operation in Amphitheater D," Dr. Starbuck explained to Gillian. "I walked out and heard her scream, then the tray she was carrying fell with a crash. She said she'd seen a tall man wearing a black robe. He had luminous eyes."

"And she fainted in your arms?" Gillian asked quietly.

"And I," Dr. Hoyle put in, "came down the stairs at the end of that corridor—where she'd seen this strange specter—about six seconds later."

"What did you see?"

"My old pal, here, scooping her up in his arms. And a very pretty picture it was—he so strong and willing!"

"No man with luminous eyes?"

"No, Mr. Hazeltine. Except for the touching scene I've described, the corridor was empty."

"What was she doing with that tray?" Gillian asked.

Dr. Barnum answered, "Taking it to a special diet case at the end of the corridor."

And Dan Starbuck added, "I've had the stairways, and all elevators and entrances, including the ambulance entrance, checked. No one saw such a creature."

The girl on the settee groaned again. "I—I'm sorry I'm causing all this trouble."

Gillian walked over to her. Nurse Green gazed up at him with large, troubled blue eyes.

"Have you been overworking, Miss Green?"

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She moved her head slightly in the negative. "No. There's no reason for me to be having hallucinations. I—I swear I saw that—that man."

"And his eyes were luminous?"

"Yes. They—they glowed. He came walking toward me from that end of the corridor. It's—it's rather badly lighted. He had those awful eyes fixed on me. And when he got close he said, in this low, horrible voice, 'The hour grows late.'"

"Have you any theories as to what that meant?"

"No, Mr. Hazeltine. And it utterly terrified me."

"How long have you been a nurse in this hospital?"

"Eight months, since my probation."

"A total of three years and eight months?"

"Yes, sir."

She was gazing at young Dr. Starbuck with a look so wistful, so yearning, that Gillian was inclined to think that this matter of the ghost had a very simple solution indeed.

"Dr. Hoyle," Gillian said, turning, "how long after she had seen this mysterious figure did you come out into the corridor?"

"Only a few seconds."

"Did you hear her scream?"

"Yes, sir. I was at the top of the stairs."

"And none of you saw this man with glowing eyes?"

Evidently, no one had.

GILLIAN, at this point, became aware that the lovely red-headed surgeon was gazing steadily at Dan Starbuck with a strange, speculative look. Gillian glanced at Starbuck. The young man was staring at the floor. He appeared to have forgotten the presence of the people in his office. He was frowning a little, as if in deep thought. He looked worried.

At this moment a girl walked into the room, another nurse, and at sight of her Gillian gave a little grunt of surprise.

It was the first surprise of several which were to enliven this night. For the nurse who walked in was none other than Mary Brown! His little mystery ship that had passed in the night! The girl who had crowded into the telephone booth to hide from the young man with the scar!

But she was lovelier in the crisp white of a nurse's uniform. The white simplicity emphasized her Irish loveliness—the dark hair, the deep-blue Irish eyes, the wonderful complexion. She looked at Gillian, and he saw that she did not remember him. And he suddenly realized that this girl had bought two tickets on the plane for Dallas, leaving Greenfield at 3 A.M. Thursday. And tonight was Wednesday!

She said, in that charming voice which Gillian had admired so, "I beg your pardon, Dr. Starbuck; but I've just heard that Miss Green saw a ghost."

"Yes, Miss Kelly," Dr. Starbuck answered.

"I was at the opposite end of the corridor," Miss Kelly—or Miss Brown—said in a firm little voice. "I heard her scream, I saw her drop the tray, and I saw her faint in your arms. But I saw no ghost—or anything else."

"This," Dr. Creed murmured, "is really amazing."

But Gillian was looking at the girl on the settee. For a moment—for only the shortest measurable interval of time—he saw an expression in her eyes as she stared at Miss Kelly. It was

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stark and awful hatred. It was the hatred of a woman fully capable of murder. And then it was gone—and the dazed and troubled look was back.

DR. BARNUM was questioning Nurse Kelly. The girl insisted that she had commanded an excellent view down the corridor for the length of it; she reiterated that she had seen Miss Green drop the tray; had heard her scream; had seen her fall into Dr. Starbuck's arms. But she was positive there had been no ghost.

"Why didn't you report this sooner?" Dr. Creed asked.

"Because I didn't attach any importance to it. I just heard that there was a ghost."

Gillian was trying to see some connection between all this and that episode at the airport, when he received another shock.

He heard crisp footfalls in the corridor, and a man came into the room —a tall young man, a pale young man with a black mustache and intensely dark eyes, and a pale scar zigzagging from the inner corner of his left eye across his forehead to his hairline.

At his entrance the little group fell silent, and Gillian's heart gave a great thump, for there was no question that this was the young man from whom the beautiful Miss Brown—or Miss Kelly—had hidden that night at the airport!

The man with the scar glanced at the group in the room. Then his eyes remained fixed on the red-haired woman's face for a long moment. Gillian saw her flush pinkly, but she did not look away.

Gillian, always sensitive to atmospheres, was intrigued by the impression of strange undercurrents in this room.

The man with the scar looked at the tall anæsthetist, Dr. Hoyle. He said, drawling, "Jeff, my anæsthetist wants your advice. Can you spare a moment?"

Dr. Hoyle seemed to stiffen a little, or so it seemed to the watchful Gillian, and said, "Dan, how soon are we doing that duodenal?"

Dr. Starbuck glanced at his wrist watch and answered, "Fourteen minutes."

The anæsthetist shrugged. "I can spare a moment."

"Lee," Dr. Creed broke in, "I want you to meet the great criminal lawyer —Gillian Hazeltine. Gillian, this is Lee Tichman, our brain specialist."

Dr. Tichman nodded at Gillian, but did not offer his hand. And Gillian, so sensitive to personal atmospheres, believed he sensed a general hostility to to the man with the scar.

When the anæsthetist and the brain specialist went out, Gillian was conscious of a definite bewilderment. He felt angry. When anything bewildered him, he always felt angry. Something definitely was going on here.

What connection was there between that mysterious episode at the airport and tonight's mysterious stranger with glowing eyes?

Who was lying and who wasn't—and why?

Dr. Barnum seemed to sense the irritation in him, for she touched his arm and said, "Mr. Hazeltine, could you spare me a moment? My office is just down the hall."

And when the blond girl on the settee started to rise, the red-headed surgeon said, "No, Miss Green. Please lie there. Mr. Hazeltine will want to talk to you in a moment."

Dr. Starbuck glanced at his watch again and mentioned, "We have a

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duodenal in twelve minutes, Claudia. I'll see you in F."

CHAPTER III.

THE HARRIDAN.

GILLIAN accompanied Dr. Barnum to her office, farther along the same corridor. She closed the door, seated herself on the edge of the desk, and requested Gillian to sit down.

He did so and looked at her expectantly. He liked her forthright manner. He liked her clear, unflirtatious eyes, and her smile, which definitely had great charm. She was not a beautiful woman. Once she might have been, but the demands of her career had changed soft loveliness into a decided handsomeness. He was always amazed at beautiful women who took up these difficult careers.

The serene, musical voice was saying, "I honestly don't think there's anything very mysterious about tonight's business, Mr. Hazeltine. Nancy Green is a fairly familiar type. Until five years ago, she was the spoiled daughter of a very rich man—Mortimer Green, the banker. When he lost his fortune, Nancy took up what struck her as being a romantic career—nursing.

"She is really a decided neurotic—actually, an exhibitionist. What she did tonight was to put on a little exhibition—to attract attention, to get the center of the stage. In addition to that, she has a terrific crush on Dr. Starbuck. She timed it rather neatly to faint in his nice, strong arms."

Gillian said, "I wonder if it's as simple as that. Has this other nurse—Miss Kelly—a reputation for honesty?"

"Carolyn Kelly is one of our most reliable nurses—a splendid young woman."

"How do you account for these other mysterious occurrences, doctor?"

"The missing narcotics—and the mysterious and beautiful visitor to Dr. Starbuck's room? I have no theories, although I do think there's a certain undercurrent in this hospital. There is dissatisfaction, and there's trouble brewing. But you must remember that Dr. Creed is old."

"Losing his grip?"

"I suppose it really amounts to that."

There was a knock at the door. Dr. Starbuck's voice said, "Ready for that duodenal, Claudia?"

"Coming," she answered crisply.

"Is Dr. Hoyle a practical joker?" Gillian asked.

The red-headed surgeon's handsome eyes seemed to sparkle.

"I wouldn't call him that—no, Mr. Hazeltine. He had a grand sense of humor. He's really a delightful person—and not cruel. Practical jokers are cruel."

She got up and went to the door, and Gillian followed. When she and Dr. Starbuck had gone, he went into Dr. Starbuck's office. Nancy Green was now sitting on the settee and was alone.

She said, "Dr. Creed left word for you to drop in at his house when you're through with your investigation. The excitement has tired him."

Gillian closed the door.

"Miss Green," he said bluntly, "what was your object in lying to us?"

And for a moment he saw, as if a mask had been withdrawn, that same stark look in her eyes he had glimpsed for an instant earlier. It was gone so

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quickly that he could hardly have said that he actually saw it, yet he had seen it, and it made him uneasy. It was hatred in the raw.

Her eyes were glowing dreamily at him now.

"I don't know what you mean," she said sweetly. "I didn't imagine it, Mr. Hazeltine. I'm sure—"

"You're still lying," he said harshly. But he did not surprise that murderous look again.

The nurse looked meek and submissive.

"But I did see that—that man," she said.

He did not think he could bluff this girl, but he would try. "Too many mysterious things have been happening, Miss Green. I'm going to get at the bottom of them. There will be an extensive investigation. Whoever is involved will get into serious trouble. If you can be helpful in clearing up these mysteries, I will promise to protect you."

He had said the same thing on many previous occasions. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't.

Miss Green said calmly, "If I could help you, I would. I've heard these rumors, but I know nothing more about these mysteries than you do."

She got up and went gracefully to the door. She reminded Gillian a little of a yellow panther he had once seen. She was as graceful and quite as dangerous.

AS she went out, the telephone on Dr. Starbuck's desk rang. He hesitated, then answered it. A woman's voice said, "Is this Mr. Hazeltine?"

"Yes."

"I am speaking for Miss Hannah Starbuck. This is Miss Halliday, the floor nurse in charge of her case. Miss Starbuck heard you were in the hospital and is most anxious to see you. It's Room 319. Can you come?"

"I'll be there immediately," Gillian said.

He went to the third floor and found Room 310. A plump, pretty young brunette let him in. She whispered, "I don't think she should talk to you very long, Mr. Hazeltine. She is not at all strong, and this has been a very bad day."

A shrill voice from the bed said, "Is that Gillian Hazeltine, Nora?"

"Yes, Miss Starbuck."

"Have him come in. And stay out of here."

The nurse went out and Gillian went in. The woman in the bed looked like an old harridan. She had the eyes of a hawk—sharp and bright and piercing—and the lantern jaw and the thin-lipped, large, grim mouth of a woman accustomed to having her way.

She snapped, "Sit down, young man. It's high time you were sent for to probe into this mess. If you want to smoke, smoke. I don't mind smoke."

Gillian, a little uncomfortable under this barrage, sat down, but he did not smoke.

"In case you don't know who I am," the edged voice went on, "I am Dan Starbuck's aunt, obviously, on his paternal side. It's scandalous, the goings on in this hospital. And that ghost Nancy Green claims she saw is just about the limit."

"Oh, you heard about Miss Green's ghost?" Gillian said.

"I hear about everything that goes on in this hospital," Miss Starbuck barked. "Every hospital is always a hotbed of rumors and malicious gossip, but I've never been in one as bad

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as this. I know all about the narcotic pilferage, and I know all about that mysterious blond woman who drank the bottle of gin in Dan's rooms, and I know all about this hemophiliac case."

"You mean," Gillian said hopefully, "you know who or what is at the bottom of it all?"

"Of course I don't!" Miss Starbuck cried. "But I've got my theories. I do nothing all day long but lie in this bed, thinking these things out. Hasn't it occurred to you that these so-called mysteries are a little too systematic?"

"It has."

"And what conclusions have you drawn?"

"None—yet."

"Do you want my theories?"

"I do, very much."

"Are you sure that door is closed?"

He looked. "Yes, Miss Starbuck."

"Then see if any one is eavesdropping outside."

GILLIAN was sure now that he was wasting his time on a woman with a sick mind. But to humor her he went to the door, opened it quickly and looked.

A man, dressed as a hospital orderly, had been crouching close to the door, probably with one ear to the keyhole. He sprang up in confusion and backed away. He wore a foxlike grin.

"You must have dropped something," Gillian said dryly.

"Yes. That's right. I dropped something, and I was stooping down to pick it up, just as you opened that door."

The orderly was backing away.

"Wait a minute!" Gillian snapped. "What's your name?"

The man turned and ran. The voice of the woman in 310 cried shrilly, "Never mind. I recognized his voice. It's Cleve Salter."

Gillian reëntered the room and closed the door.

MARY BROWN

Miss Starbuck said, "And there's another mystery. He's always skulking around outside this room. But I don't attach much importance to him. He just knows that this room is a clearing house for gossip. Sit down, young man."

Gillian sat down.

"Now, I'll tell you what my theory is." She pitched her voice very low. It was hardly audible. "My theory is that Dr. Creed is going crazy!"

Gillian found himself getting bewildered again. The bright, piercing eyes danced with lively lights.

"He knows he can't live long," the whisper went on. "He himself is at the bottom of these mysteries. He's doing it," she concluded triumphantly, "to test out his staff!"

Gillian saw the futility of arguing with Miss Hannah Starbuck. "Perhaps you're right," he said. "I'll look into it from that angle."

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She seemed pleased. As he started to rise, she said sharply, "Wait a minute! There's something else I want you to do for me. I want you to draw me a new will. I want to cut off Nancy Green. My old will leaves her fifty thousand dollars. I made it when I'd been here a month. She was my day nurse. I thought she was the sweetest, kindest girl I'd ever known. I've found out she's a hypocrite and a liar and a little snake. I want to leave every dollar I possess to Dan, except for one hundred dollars to you, for your services. That will enable you to probate the will, and to probate it properly."

Gillian realized that, while Miss Starbuck might have a sick brain, she knew her law.

"In this State," she said, "a holographic will is as legal as one typed and witnessed. So we'll draw a holographic will. Hand me that pad and that pen. You dictate it and I'll write and sign it. It's simple enough—everything to my nephew Dan."

"Very well." Gillian gave her the pad and the pen and told her what to write.

When she had dated and signed it, she gave it to him and said, "Lock this away. When I die, probate it. And if any one contests it, on the grounds that I'm mentally incompetent, fight them tooth and claw."

And as Gillian picked up his hat and started for the door, she said, "If you want to get to the bottom of these mysteries, begin with that crazy old man!"

GILLIAN made his escape. As he went out the door he almost fell over Cleve Salter, the orderly. The man had a small broom and dustpan and was brushing up the floor just outside the door of 310.

When he saw Gillian he started to move away.

Gillian closed Miss Starbuck's door and said politely, "Have you lost something?"

The man gave him a quick, sidewise glance and a foxy grin.

"Just sweeping up a bit," he said. "Just sweeping."

"If you find anything of interest," Gillian said dryly, "let me know."

He walked on and turned right, into another corridor, at the end of which were the elevators. And as he turned, he came upon a tableau that stopped him.

Dr. Starbuck, still in his operating gown, was in earnest and intimate conversation with a slim, small nurse. The brilliant young surgeon was standing so close to the little nurse that her shoulder was touching his arm. Her face was uplifted to his, her large eyes were staring up hungrily into his. If it had not been for some quality of despair in their faces, Gillian would have guessed that they were about to kiss.

And then he saw who the pretty nurse was. Mary Brown—alias Carolyn Kelly!

They had sprung apart. Dr. Starbuck was blushing. And the blush emphasized his appearance of cleanness. He had a rosy look as if he had just been boiled.

The nurse was blushing, too, and smiling nervously. But it was obvious that she did not recognize, in Gillian, the man with whom she had, for a breathless few seconds, shared a telephone booth.

Gillian nodded to them and passed on to the elevators. His mind was busily turning over the intriguing things he had observed in this hospital, especially in Dr. Starbuck's of-

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fice. Mentally he listed them. Nancy Green first, of course, and her ghost. Why was she lying? Nancy Green's glare of hatred at Nurse Carolyn Kelly, too. And young Dr. Starbuck's worried preoccupation. The red-headed Claudia Barnum's strange look of speculation as she had gazed at Starbuck, and the effect on her of the sinister Dr. Tichman's hypnotic eyes. To say nothing of the effect of Tichman's presence on every one in the room, especially on Dr. Hoyle, the tall, amiable anæsthetist. And on top of all this, the odd behavior of Dr. Starbuck's old aunt—and the eavesdropping orderly—and the furtive conference between Dr. Starbuck and Nurse Kelly in the corridor—the mysterious episode at the airport—and the original three strange occurrences which had prompted Dr. Creed to consult Hazeltine. What did all these things mean? What was going on?

WHEN Gillian reached Dr. Creed's house, the old man was waiting for him in his study.

"Well," he chirped, "did you find Nancy Green's ghost?"

Gillian answered wearily, "Doctor, I don't know that that girl is at the bottom of these other mysterious doings, but I'd get rid of her. She's a dangerous trouble-maker."

Dr. Creed's mouth tightened. "I can't do it, Gillian. Her father died in my hospital. I promised him I'd look after that girl. We were life-long friends. I can't let him down. Besides, I'm sorry for her. What she did tonight—if she did it deliberately, without seeing any luminous-eyed creature—wasn't very malicious. No one was hurt. I don't think she had a thing to do with these other affairs."

"It's quite likely," Gillian said amiably, "I'm mistaken in my judgment."

"Her work has really been very satisfactory. I had just made up my mind to promote her to Dr. Starbuck's operating crew, as a scrub-nurse. She's an exceedingly clever young woman."

"What can you tell me about an orderly named Cleve Salter?"

"Cleve is the orderly who reported having seen the mysterious blond woman go to Dan's room. He's been in my service for years."

"Would it spoil your trust in him to learn that he eavesdrops on conversations in patients' rooms?"

Dr. Creed laughed. "No! Cleve is nothing but an old woman. He lives on gossip. Whose room was he spying on?"

"Miss Hannah Starbuck's."

"That old witch. Did you talk to her?"

Gillian nodded. "She's very much upset over all these mysterious occurrences."

"She would be! She's nothing but a pest. She's been a patient here almost a year. She's a hypochondriac, with a really bad heart. One of these days she's going to pop off like this!" And the doctor snapped his fingers. "Pay no attention to anything she said, Gillian. Now—tell me what did you think of Dan Starbuck?"

Gillian had liked Dan Starbuck very much. He said so.

Dr. Creed beamed. "Do you think you can find out who is at the bottom of these mysteries?"

"I'm going to work on it. But my advice is the same: let me announce through the newspapers that you've made a will leaving everything to the Hobart Creed Foundation."

"Never!"

"Then don't blame me if your trou-

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bles grow much worse before we find who—or what—is at the bottom of them."

"You're clever," Dr. Creed chirped. "You'll find out."

Gillian left him, got into his car and drove home. His mind was a whirl of conjectures, but through it all ran a single design.

CHAPTER IV.

SUDDEN DEATH.

HIS house, when he reached it, was dark. His wife was in bed. Gillian went to his study, mixed himself a highball, sipped it with relish, and fixed his mind on the problems that Hobart Creed had presented to him. There were several arresting facts to think about. The foremost was that an old man, owning property worth at least fifteen million, was soon to die. Of equal importance was the fact that this old man had made no will. And another fact of weight was that Hobart Creed was determined to leave this valuable property to a young surgeon named Starbuck.

These were the facts on the one hand. The mysterious happenings Dr. Creed had mentioned were the facts on the other. Gillian was sure that these two sets of facts were related.

He was not sure of the passage of time. He was on the trail of an idea, but it was elusive. Much later he heard the pattering of rain against the study window. Still later he was surprised when the window became coldly gray.

Of the mysteries Dr. Creed had mentioned, Gillian was most interested in the one presented by the woman who had visited Dan Starbuck's room. From the beginning it had had a vaguely familiar pattern.

The strong cold light of a rainy day was shining into the smoke-filled study when Gillian caught up with that elusive idea. This capture was so startling to him that he leaped up from his desk.

Mark Storm! The plot against the Creed millions—if it should prove to be a plot—had all the familiar earmarks of that clever rogue! It was typical of the way Mark Storm's mind worked.

Mark Storm had been, until about a year ago, Gillian Hazeltine's most powerful, most active, most dangerous enemy. But Mark Storm was abroad—in France or Italy. He had gone abroad, he had announced at the time, for his health. Actually, he was one jump ahead of a grand jury investigation into his activities as district attorney of Greenfield. He was still the district attorney, with a year of his term unexpired.

Pacing up and down the study, with a cold cigar in his teeth, Gillian reflected that if Mark Storm were only in town, he would know where to lodge his suspicions. But if Mark Storm were here, he would have heard.

The telephone rang. He picked up the receiver. Dr. Creed was on the wire, incoherent with excitement. He wanted Gillian to come to the hospital at once.

"Dan Starbuck has vanished!" the old man sputtered. "Simply packed up his bags and vanished—after he'd done some very strange things. Will you come at once?"

"Yes."

Gillian drove to the hospital.

AN orderly met him at the main hospital entrance and conducted him to Dr. Creed's private office. The old man was

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slumped down in a chair with his elbows on the desk, his face in his hands, his whole attitude conveying forlornness and dejection. When Gillian spoke, he looked up. His fringe of white hair was rumpled, his little white spike of a chin whisker was askew, his eyes were blurred and red. He lifted his hands in an empty, weary gesture and let them slowly fall to the desk.

"It's the most mysterious thing that's happened so far," he said in a weak, tremulous voice. "He finished the operation he had scheduled for last night. Then he vanished—just packed his bags and lit out without a word to me or any one!"

Gillian threw his raincoat and hat on a chair.

"What time did he vanish? Who saw him?"

"An orderly saw him running through the halls with a suitcase in each hand. That was about one-thirty— But you haven't heard the strangest part yet, Gillian. Dan's aunt died quite suddenly last night, and he buried her hurriedly, before he left. I can't understand why he'd want to do that in such a rush—"

"What!" exclaimed Gillian. "He buried her, and then disappeared?—Wait!—Did he go alone? Maybe that will give us a hint?"

"I don't know whether he went alone or not," Creed answered.

"Does that nurse—the one we met with Dr. Starbuck in the corridor last night—I think her name's Miss Kelly—does she live in the hospital?"

"Yes. In the nurses' quarters."

"See if her baggage is missing from her room."

Dr. Creed dialed a number on the house telephone. In a moment he said, "Please look in Miss Kelly's room. If she isn't there, see if her baggage is there. I'll hold the line."

He looked at Gillian with a tired smile. "I think you're barking up the wrong tree, Gillian. Half the girls on my payroll are infatuated with Dan Starbuck." His smile faded as a voice spoke in the receiver at his ear. "Are you sure? I see. No. That's all, thanks."

He hung up the receiver with a look of bewilderment that would have been amusing if he had not looked so old and so forlorn.

"Her bed wasn't slept in. Her things are gone."

"I think," Gillian said gently, "I can tell you where they are."

The old man sputtered, "How the devil do you know?"

"I think," Gillian replied, "they are aboard a westbound passenger plane that stopped here this morning at three." And he erased the bewildered look from Dr. Creed's face by describing, briefly, his little encounter with the nurse at the airport.

"BUT what about Miss Starbuck's death?" Gillian demanded. "What do the hospital records show concerning her death?"

"Oh, that's all clear," Creed replied, as if to reassure himself as much as Gillian. "Dr. Barnum treated her for an attack, about nine-thirty. She had another about ten, and the floor nurse sent for Dr. Barnum a second time. Dr. Barnum was alarmed at the old lady's condition, and called Starbuck. Dan gave her caffeine sodium benzoate—then went on to F for a splenectomy. She died a few minutes after he left."

Gillian gazed at him thoughtfully, but said nothing. And the old man blustered, "She died of an attack of an-

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gina pectoris. I told you last night she'd pop off without a moment's warning. She did."

"Let's clear this up as much as possible," Gillian suggested. "You say Dr. Starbuck buried her before he disappeared. Who embalmed her?"

MARK STORM

"The Stinson and Weatherby Funeral Parlors."

From Stinson and Weatherby Gillian learned that Miss Hannah Starbuck's body had been embalmed and delivered to Elmwood Cemetery at 2 A.M. She had been buried. Dr. Alexis Parkman had read the burial service. Gillian now called Dr. Alexis Parkman. The clergyman sounded sleepy and confused.

"Dr. Parkman, do you know why Dr. Starbuck was in such a hurry to have his aunt buried?"

"I—I gave my word of honor to say nothing."

"Wasn't a pretty little Irish girl named Kelly with him?"

"As a matter of fact, she was."

"Did you marry them at the cemetery?"

Gillian listened to the answer, hung up the receiver, and swung around to Dr. Creed. "Dan Starbuck was married to Carolyn Kelly by Dr. Parkman in the sexton's house immediately after the burial service."

The old man groaned. "Why—" he began.

"Let's clear up a few points. You say Miss Starbuck died suddenly in an attack of angina pectoris. Her nephew, to whom she willed all her money, immediately had her embalmed and buried. Her nephew then flew to Mexico."

Hobart Creed jumped up. His lined old face was no longer waxy pale, but flushed with anger. "You're insinuating that he murdered that old harridan! I tell you she died of angina pectoris!" he shouted.

As if he had not heard, Gillian said musingly, "The girl bought tickets for Dallas. There's a connection from Dallas to Brownsville for the Pan American Tampico-Mexico City plane. It's hard to extradite a man from Mexico, even on a murder charge. And Mexico City is only a short jump from Honduras, where you can't extradite a man on any charge."

The old man shouted furiously, "He did not murder that woman!"

"Murder?" a calm, deep voice said inquiringly. "Has some one been murdered?"

Gillian whirled about. A tall man was standing in the doorway.

The color drained from Gillian's face. The man in the doorway was Mark Storm!

CHAPTER V.

DEAD DOCTOR.

AS Gillian stared at his most powerful and dangerous enemy, Mark Storm held out his right hand. "Ah, Gillian," he said, with enthusi-

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asm, "what an unexpected pleasure!"

Unprepared for this meeting as he was, Gillian felt a wave of anger surge through him. Mark Storm, with his suave, courtly manners, invariably made him feel awkward and clumsy and furious.

This time it was worse. For the district attorney, that ruthless and clever scoundrel, had made his entrance in time to hear that unfortunate word "murder"—and perhaps more.

Gillian said harshly, "When did you get back?" And he ignored the outstretched hand.

The district attorney withdrew his hand, but he continued to smile. "Late yesterday afternoon," he answered in his rich, deep voice. "What a wonderful trip it was! What a really fascinating place Italy is, Gillian! The sunshine! The flowers! The music! The wines!"

At that moment, with the ill-timed word "murder" still echoing in his mind, Gillian's hatred of Mark Storm attained heights it had never reached before. He had always hated the district attorney. Certainly, he had never envied him, in spite of the man's handsomeness, his tallness, his manners of a Continental diplomat. On legal battlefields he had proved himself Storm's equal—or superior. Time after time he had outwitted, outsmarted Storm. Yet it had given him very little satisfaction. And each time they met, Storm's suavity, his unfailing charm, infuriated Gillian—and turned his fingers to thumbs.

Dr. Creed had been standing with his back to a window, staring uneasily at Storm. The district attorney smiled at him, then slowly walked toward him. In this hostile atmosphere he was perfectly at ease. His manners were always perfect and easy. And in his dress he was perfect, too. The dark suit he was wearing had no doubt been made for him by a London tailor who catered exclusively to royalty—and wealthy Americans. A full head taller than Gillian, with wide shoulders and the figure of an athlete, Mark Storm wore his clothes beautifully.

As if he were greeting a fellow ambassador, he said, "Ah! Good morning, Dr. Creed. You know me, of course? I am Mark Storm, the district attorney. Isn't it a wretched morning?"

Staring at him rather wildly, the old man answered shrilly, "What are you doing here? What do you want?"

And with the charming, easy smile, the district attorney said, "It's really hardly more than a social call, doctor."

"At this hour of the morning?" Dr. Creed cried.

"As a matter of fact, doctor, I was a little curious about the speedy embalming and burial of one of your patients—a Miss Hannah Starbuck. The coroner's office notified me that a death certificate had been issued, and I learned that this patient was embalmed and buried, all within a matter of hours—and at night. Of course, it can be explained to every one's satisfaction."

"Miss Starbuck," Gillian said quietly, "died in an attack of angina pectoris. The hospital records show it."

"Her nephew, Dr. Starbuck, attended her in that fatal attack, didn't he?"

"He did," Gillian snapped.

The district attorney shrugged and made a foreign gesture with his hands, as if to indicate how simply the entire matter could be cleared up.

"If you will call Dr. Starbuck in here, I'm sure everything can be explained very nicely."

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Dr. Creed sat down heavily in a chair. He looked exhausted.

GILLIAN was thinking rapidly. He knew now, very definitely, that his suspicions of last night had been correct. He knew, very definitely, that Mark Storm was somehow at the bottom of the mysterious troubles Dr. Creed had been having.

"Is this matter really important enough," he asked, "to justify your coming here in person?"

Mark Storm smiled at him almost affectionately. "My dear Gillian, I made it a point to come in person, not because I knew you were here, and therefore—"

"We'll pass that," Gillian said.

"Very well. I came in person because of the possibility of a scandal. Like any other public-spirited citizen, I would hate to see Dr. Creed and his wonderful hospital involved in any scandal. I simply considered it my duty to offer my services."

"They aren't needed," Dr. Creed snapped. "There is no scandal. There is going to be no scandal."

"Of course not," Storm suavely agreed. "We're going to clear up the slightest possibility of a scandal by calling Dr. Starbuck in here to answer a few simple questions."

Dr. Creed looked helplessly at Gillian, and Gillian said curtly, "Dr. Starbuck is not here."

Mark Storm made a grimace involving eyes and mouth, as of surprise and shock.

"He eloped," Dr. Creed wearily added, "immediately after his aunt's burial, with one of the nurses here."

"How romantic!" Storm exclaimed. "But unfortunate. It really places us in quite a quandary, doesn't it?"

"It doesn't," Gillian answered, "unless one of us should happen to have an ax to grind. Dr. Starbuck is one of the best known surgeons in the State—a man of unquestioned honor. Simply because he had his aunt, who happened to die suddenly in a heart attack—simply because he had her embalmed and buried in a hurry doesn't make a murderer of him. Or does it, Mr. Storm?"

"I have the utmost respect for your judgment, Gillian," Storm answered. "In fact, I wouldn't have made this call if I'd known the situation was in such capable hands. But now that I'm here, suppose we try to clear everything up. Didn't I hear Dr. Creed discussing a murder as I came in?"

"A purely academic argument," Dr. Creed said nervously.

"Ah, I see. But tell me, where is Dr. Starbuck?"

"He is flying to Mexico, we believe."

"And you're not suspicious?"

"Not in the least."

THERE was a knock at the closed door. Gillian went to it and opened it. A messenger boy was in the corridor with a radiogram for Dr. Creed.

Gillian gave it to the old man, who tore open the envelope, nervously read the typed sheet of paper it contained, then cried, "Read this, Gillian! It's all right! Everything's all right!"

Gillian read the radiogram. It was dated 7 A.M., aboard Transcontinental Plane No. 11, in flight.

> Your radiogram received. Was terribly sorry to leave under such circumstances, but must remind you I have tried and tried for five months to get away and you have repeatedly refused me leave of absence. My work is all cleared up and I will be back on the job in three weeks.

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Please wire forgiveness and blessings to Carolyn and me, Hotel St. Regis, Mexico City. DANIEL STARBUCK.

When he looked up, Dr. Creed cried jubilantly, "It's all right. I don't blame him. I overloaded him with work and responsibility. He certainly had a right to run off and have a honeymoon!"

Gillian had passed the radiogram to Mark Storm. The district attorney read it and said, "It does seem to clear things up, doesn't it, Gillian?"

"It does," Gillian confirmed. "I happen to know that the young lady he married bought their airline tickets several days ago."

"That's splendid," Storm said heartily. "And of course he had no motive for killing his aunt."

"Certainly not!" Dr. Creed shrilled.

"She didn't," Storm persisted, "by any chance name Dr. Starbuck as her beneficiary under a will disposing of a considerable estate?"

Gillian removed from his pocket the sheet of paper which contained Miss Starbuck's Last Will and Testament. In silence Storm read it. When he had finished he looked up inquiringly at Gillian.

"It really proves nothing, of course," he murmured.

There was a confused sound of fumbling and scratching at the corridor door, a sharp rattling of fingernails against the frosted glass panel, then the door burst open.

A white-faced nurse with wildly staring eyes came staggering in.

"Dr. Creed!" she panted. "Dr. Creed! There—there's been a murder! Dr. Hoyle was stabbed! The painter just found him!"

The old man groaned, "Oh, no!"

Gillian was watching Mark Storm. The district attorney merely stopped smiling. There was not the slightest trace of surprise or shock in his face. And Gillian wondered if he had had private information, hours ago, about this shocking new development.

"Who is—or was—Dr. Hoyle?" Storm asked quietly.

Dr. Creed groaned, "Starbuck's anæsthetist."

"Not really!" Storm said, with an air of sudden excitement. "How long has he been dead?" he asked swiftly.

But the girl did not know. Dr. Hoyle's office was being decorated. He hadn't been using it for several days. That was why he hadn't been found earlier. The painter had just gone in to begin his day's work and found the body.

"With—with a knife in his throat!" the white-faced girl whimpered.

"And he was Starbuck's anæsthetist!" Storm said dreamily. "This is really amazing."

"Why?" Gillian snapped.

"That he should have been Starbuck's anæsthetist—and Starbuck is now on his way to Mexico. Perhaps we'd better investigate this, Gillian." And graciously to the nurse, "If you'll show us the way?"

DR. CREED started up from his chair, and Gillian said quickly, "You'd better not come, doctor."

"You'd better," Storm gently added, "leave everything to Mr. Hazeltine. I assure you, you can depend absolutely upon his judgment. I've never known him to be wrong, or to make a mistake."

And he bowed slightly to Gillian, indicating that Gillian was to precede him through the doorway. Gillian had suffered under many such compliments

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from Mark Storm. And when Storm was at his politest, he was also at his wiliest.

Gillian knew that Storm was so sure of himself, so confident of the success of his present dark plans, that he was, behind this mask of suave courtesy, laughing at him.

The nurse conducted them down the corridor to an elevator. Dr. Hoyle's office was on the same floor as Amphitheaters D, E, and F.

The corridor about the entrance to the anæsthetist's office was crowded with people in white—nurses, doctors, internes and orderlies, all excitedly chattering. Some peered in at the open door, and a familiar voice said, "Better not go in. The police will want nothing touched."

Gillian glanced sharply at the speaker and met the steady black eyes of the young man with the scar. The scar, zigzagging from the inner corner of his left eye to his hairline, looked paler this morning.

Dr. Tichman said, with a headshake, "What a horrible thing!" And Gillian nodded.

Just beyond the man with the scar he had seen another familiar face—the handsome, somewhat willful face of the red-haired Dr. Claudia Barnum.

She gave Gillian a wan smile, then her eyes filled with tears and she turned away.

In a small, neck-craning group at the door was the platinum blond nurse who had seen the ghost. She was talking rapidly and with energy. It was her theory that poor Dr. Hoyle had been stabbed and dragged into this office. Then she turned her head, saw him, and loudly whispered, "Look! Here's Gillian Hazeltine and the district attorney already!"

The crowd parted for the two men. Gillian's heart was beating rapidly, with a sickly thump. He was afraid of dead men. He hated corpses.

The room had been stripped bare of all furniture, and the floor covered from wall to wall with sheets of coarse brown paper. Against one wall between two windows stood a stepladder, and in a corner were buckets of paint, and brushes.

The air of the room was heavy with the odors of volatile oils, turpentine, linseed oil and Japanese dryer. And in a corner of the room was stretched the body of the anæsthetist. He wore a white operating-room gown. He lay on his back, with his arms beside him, his knees drawn up slightly, his dark eyes glassily regarding the recently painted ceiling.

Gillian glanced at his throat, and shivered slightly. The bone handle of a knife protruded from the left side of the dead man's Adam's apple. A quantity of blood had spurted from the wound, spattering on the white gown, and there was a small dried and blackened river of it on his neck.

MARK STORM, staring down at the dead anæsthetist, made a clicking sound with his tongue and teeth. He said sadly, "What a pity! He was one of the greatest anæsthetists in this part of the country!"

"Really?" Gillian drawled. "A moment ago, in Dr. Creed's office, you had to ask who he was."

The district attorney made no acknowledgment of this thrust. He looked behind him at the group of men in white who had followed them in, and said briskly, "Can any of you gentlemen answer a couple of rather important questions? We'd like to know whose knife this is, if possible,

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and how long this poor fellow has been dead."

A gray-haired doctor answered, "That knife belongs to Dr. Starbuck."

"And that," Gillian said with irony, "will prove to be the first of a series of amazing coincidences. Who saw Starbuck stab this man? Any eye witnesses?"

There were no answers. The gray-haired doctor said, "I examined the body, Mr. Storm, a moment ago. Rigor mortis undoubtedly set in several hours ago. He is quite rigid now. I should say he died about midnight."

SILKY DAVIS

"Not within the past couple of hours?" Storm said sharply.

"Oh, no. He has been dead at least since midnight."

"Thank you, doctor. Gillian, it's beginning to look as if Dan Starbuck will have a very brief honeymoon. Things look pretty dark for him."

"Very dark," Gillian agreed. "Has any one a pocket microscope?"

One of the nurses had one. She gave it to Gillian. He bent down and examined the bone handle of the knife through the powerful lenses.

"No fingerprints," he announced. "Well, we expected that, didn't we, Storm? Wouldn't you say that this is the kind of murder in which no fingerprints would have been left?"

"In such matters," Storm suavely answered, "I prefer to depend on your infallible judgment, Gillian."

A nurse said, "Pardon me, gentlemen, but I think the time of Dr. Hoyle's death might have been earlier than midnight. Dr. Hoyle was to have given the anæsthetic to a patient Dr. Starbuck operated on at eleven-thirty last night. We could not find Dr. Hoyle anywhere. I was one of the nurses Dr. Starbuck sent out to try to locate him. But no one had seen him since he finished with the splenectomy in F. We had to use another anæsthetist. It never occurred to any of us to look in here, as we all knew this office was being painted and was empty."

The district attorney courteously thanked her and said, "Have any of you any suspicions?"

The platinum blond nurse said quickly, "Isn't that knife suspicious? I know it was Dr. Starbuck's. I've seen it on the little shelf beside his desk dozens of times."

Gillian asked her where Dr. Starbuck's office was.

"Three doors down this hall."

"Can any one tell us anything more about this knife?" Gillian asked. Once again his eyes were met by the clear, hard black eyes of the young man with the scar.

"It's a double-edged amputation knife," Dr. Tichman said. "It's an heirloom of Starbuck's. He inherited it from his grandfather, who was an army surgeon on the Rebel side in the Civil War."

"A double-edged amputation knife?" Gillian repeated.

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"Yes, sir. It was used in amputations—to slash away flesh, muscle and so on in the amputation of a limb."

"Why has it two edges?"

"So that the operating surgeon can slash quickly in both directions. The two edges gives greater speed in an amputation, and in any amputation speed is very important."

Mark Storm had been staring at the dead man's face. He said, "Gillian, do you believe this poor fellow was stabbed outside and then placed in this room?"

"No. There would be a trail of blood from the door. He was stabbed in that corner."

"I'd like to see Dr. Starbuck's office and his room, if he lived here in the hospital. Will some one show me?"

"I will," Miss Green said promptly.

"Would you care to come, Gillian?"

"No," Gillian curtly answered. "And I'd like every one out of this room."

CHAPTER VI.

ARSENIC.

WHEN they were gone and the door was closed, Gillian began a methodical inspection of the room. He expected to find nothing of the slightest interest. He was convinced that this murder had been carefully, deliberately planned and executed and that, beyond the knife, no clues would be found.

Yet he surprised in himself the beginnings of doubts as to Dan Starbuck's innocence. He had all along had feelings of sympathy for the young man, and had accepted Dr. Creed's praises of him at their face value. But it was hard to maintain his belief in that brilliant young surgeon's innocence in the face of all that had happened. On the other hand, Mark Storm's very interest in this case made Gillian suspicious of all obvious evidence.

On hands and knees he went over the floor of the office. He found nothing of interest until, finally, he reached the corner where the dead man lay.

Gillian sat back on his haunches and stared at the freshly painted wall. The ivory paint was hardly dry. A faint irregularity on the painted surface caused him to stand up. The faint mark on the wall proved to be an impression of a rounded oblong shape, about three-quarters of an inch long by a little less than half an inch wide. Definitely, it was an impression that had been made in the fresh paint last night, doubtless at the time of the murder. It might, indeed, prove to have something to do with the murder. It was at about the height of Gillian's eyes. He studied it a long time, but it meant nothing to him.

He was about to step back, when the lower periphery of his vision was attracted by a faint metallic gleam. This gleam originated in the crisp black hair of the dead man, at a point just above the medulla oblongata. Bending down for a closer inspection, Gillian found that it was a circular metal plate, presumably silver, embedded in the skull. It meant, of course, that at some time Dr. Hoyle had had a brain operation, and that this plate had been placed over the hole in the skull to replace the bone that had been removed.

The dead man's hair had been habitually brushed over the plate, to conceal it, but in the struggle previous to his death—if indeed there had been a struggle—the carefully brushed lock

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had been disturbed and the plate exposed.

Trying to visualize the last moments of Dr. Hoyle's life, Gillian studied the position of the fallen body, gazed long at the freshly painted wall, unsullied except for that mysterious oblong impression. And gradually he reconstructed, to some extent, that moment of violence which had ended Dr. Hoyle's life. Excited, he bent down and, with the pocket microscope, examined the silver plate.

As well as he could determine without dusting powder, the plate was barren of fingerprints. Its slight sheen, due to natural oil from the hair, was unmarked.

He decided he would have a fingerprint expert from headquarters examine the plate with the proper equipment, but he was disappointed. The only possible clue proved meaningless. And the small, faint rectangular impression in the fresh paint was likewise without meaning.

Gillian went to the door and opened it. A knot of nurses and doctors was still gathered in the corridor, whispering.

He said to them, "Do any of you know if Dr. Hoyle, at some time, had an operation on his skull?"

None of them, it appeared, knew of such an operation. He said to a young doctor, "Will you make a careful inquiry and find out, if you possibly can, if any one in this hospital knows of such an operation on Dr. Hoyle's brain?"

AS he walked away Dr. Claudia Barnum came out of a room into the corridor. She looked pale and tired. She put her hand on Gillian's arm and said quietly, "You don't think he murdered Dr. Hoyle, do you?"

Gillian, looking down into her lovely eyes, said, "I don't know. I hope not."

"It's a horrible thing." She shuddered. "I—I feel lost, Mr. Hazeltine. I worked with both of them for so long. And now Dr. Starbuck's gone, and Dr. Hoyle—"

She sighed unhappily.

Gillian said, "Do you think Starbuck did it?"

She looked up quickly. "I don't know what to think. But somehow I don't think he's the sort of person who could. When you've worked side by side with a man, Mr. Hazeltine, you come to know him very well. I've never respected any one as much as I respect Dan Starbuck. And I don't believe he's a murderer!"

There was a little color in her cheeks now, and her handsome eyes were flashing. Looking at her, Gillian wondered if she was sincere.

"Would you," he said, "take me to Hannah Starbuck's room, and tell me just what happened there last night?"

"Certainly." Quietly, briskly, Dr. Claudia Barnum led the way. As she opened the door of 310 she said, "The bedding has been removed, of course, but aside from that I believe everything is just the same as it was when she died."

Gillian glanced around.

"Tell me," he said, "what happened when you were called up here."

"Well, she was having an attack when I got here, but she responded to treatment and seemed better. I left to assist Dr. Starbuck with an appendectomy, and afterwards came back here. Miss Starbuck was beginning to have another attack. It was worse than the first."

"That was when you sent for Dr. Starbuck?"

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"Yes. When he came in she tried to say something to him, and he asked me to leave. I went out in the corridor. After a while I looked in. He said he had given her an injection of caffeine sodium benzoate, and she seemed better. It was time for him to go to operate on young Mr. Van Dorne, so he left, and I waited here and looked at Miss Starbuck again. She was quieter. Then I went down to assist Dr. Starbuck with the splenectomy, and, according to the chart, his aunt died just a few minutes after I left. She was dead when the floor nurse got back."

Gillian nodded thoughtfully.

"Thank you, Dr. Barnum."

The red-haired woman sighed wearily and turned toward the door. "I must see a patient, Mr. Hazeltine. Will you excuse me?"

"Of course. Just one more thing. Who is the nurse who was attending Miss Starbuck last night—the one who called you here?"

"Miss Halliday—the head floor nurse."

"Please send her here."

With speculation in his eyes, he watched her go. Then he glanced once more about the room. On the floor near the washstand a sparkle of light caught his attention. He bent down. It was a tiny particle of glass. Near it were others. Gillian studied them, wondering if they could mean anything.

At the moment they did not. But he mentally filed away their presence on the floor for future attention.

PRESENTLY the plump, pretty nurse who had admitted him to Miss Starbuck's room, the night before, came in. She smiled at him. "Yes, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"There are a few things I would like to know, Miss Halliday. I understand that Miss Starbuck's fatal attack started about ten last night."

"That's right."

"And she died a little before ten-thirty?"

"Yes, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Aside from Dr. Barnum and Dr. Starbuck, did any one enter this room during that time?"

"No one. At least, not that I know of."

Gillian frowned. "Do you recall having seen an orderly named Cleve Salter in the corridor or in the neighborhood of this room during that time?"

Miss Halliday looked surprised. "I don't remember seeing him. But I might have, Mr. Hazeltine. I wouldn't be apt to remember. He's around so much of the time, you see. He's—well, he's everywhere!" She smiled.

"Do you recall seeing any one else in the corridor during that half hour?"

Her answer startled him. "Just Dr. Hoyle. After Dr. Starbuck and Dr. Barnum took charge of Miss Starbuck I went on making my rounds. When I started back here to 310 I saw Dr. Hoyle standing by the elevators. But I don't remember seeing any one else."

Gillian thought for a minute, then pointed to a door near the bed.

"Where does that lead?"

"Into a bathroom that connects this room with 312."

Gillian was interested. "Any one in 312?"

"A pneumonia case. Mrs. Janson."

"How long has she been in there?"

"She was brought in about midnight last night."

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"Was 312 empty until then?"

"Yes. Nurse Green went in about ten o'clock to prepare the room for Mrs. Janson."

Gillian raised an eyebrow. "Nancy Green?"

"Yes."

"The girl who sees ghosts?"

Miss Halliday smiled. "Yes."

"How long was she in there?"

"I don't know, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Was this door into the bathroom locked—or the one from the bathroom into 312?"

"No. Neither one."

Gillian thanked her, and took an elevator to the ninth floor. He went directly to Dr. Hoyle's office.

WHEN he was a few feet away from the door he saw Mark Storm and the pretty platinum blond nurse, Nancy Green, coming along the hall. The nurse was talking rapidly, and Mark Storm, with his head courteously inclined, his expression attentive, was listening.

Gillian studied Miss Green speculatively. He was curious about that ghost she had seen; but he was more curious about Miss Green herself.

Approaching him, Storm said, with a sad shake of the head, "It's beginning to look as if our brilliant young surgeon wasn't flying his true colors."

"You should have seen what we found under his bed!" Miss Green cried.

"Another corpse?" Gillian said dryly.

"No, no! Bottles! Dozens of them! Empty gin and cocaine bottles!"

"I understand," Storm said gravely, "that there have been mysterious thefts of cocaine from the dispensary."

"Of course," the platinum blond said eagerly, "Dr. Starbuck couldn't have robbed the dispensary so systematically."

"Why not?" Gillian asked.

"Heavens, Mr. Hazeltine, he isn't that kind!"

"It's very mysterious, isn't it, Miss Green?"

"It's simply ghastly!" she said.

"The young man," Mark Storm somberly went on, "was apparently a secret drinker and a drug addict."

"It's such a pity," the nurse added. "Dr. Creed had such faith in him. It'll simply break his poor old heart."

"I've just heard about another curious happening in connection with Starbuck," Storm said. "A few days ago, he performed an operation on a hemophiliac—a bleeder. And the poor chap died on the table of hemorrhage."

"Who told you about that?"

"I did," Miss Green said. "It was so tragic."

"Or could it have been," Storm asked, "criminal negligence? What do you think, Gillian?"

"I haven't an opinion."

"If Dr. Starbuck was a drunkard and a dope fiend, as he seems to have been," the blond girl put in, "what can anyone think?"

Gillian looked at her steadily, for a long time, until Miss Green suddenly dropped her large, beautiful, and somewhat bold blue eyes.

"That's what I've been wondering," he drawled. "Just what to think."

The girl quickly blushed, then as quickly lost her color.

She said, in some confusion, "You'll have to excuse me, Mr. Storm. I'm on duty." She left them hurriedly.

The district attorney was gazing into the room at the dead man. "What did you find, Gillian?"

"Nothing of consequence."

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"What do you think about it all?" And when Gillian hesitated: "I've learned in the past—sometimes to my discomfiture—that your judgment is infallible. I will act on your opinion."

Gillian smiled wearily. He wished that he could remember to be as suave, as charming, as courteous as Mark Storm under all conditions.

"Perhaps those bottles were planted there." And he added, drawling, "As his knife was planted in this poor devil's throat."

"You mean—you still think Starbuck is innocent—in his aunt's death and in this?"

Looking up into Mark Storm's velvety brown eyes, Gillian said bluntly: "What do you think, Storm?"

"Ah, I prefer to act entirely on your judgment. Should we have Dr. Starbuck stopped at the Mexican border?"

Gillian glanced at his watch. It was almost noon.

"Too late. He's across the border. He undoubtedly connected with the morning plane out of Brownsville for Mexico City. You'll have to extradite him now."

Courteously, Storm persisted: "Do you think we should?"

Gillian felt the temperature of his blood rising. He knew he was being kidded and had been kidded from the moment of Mark Storm's arrival at Dr. Creed's office.

But he said quietly, "If I were in your shoes, I'd extradite him. Isn't that double-edged amputation knife enough to hang him?"

GILLIAN walked on through the crowd, and found a telephone at the end of the hall. He called Aaron Savage, one of his assistants.

"Aaron," he said, "I want you to get over to the Hobart Creed Hospital as fast as you can." He explained crisply what had happened. "I want you to check up on the alibis of every soul in this hospital. Find out, as far as possible, what they were doing between ten last night and one this morning. I'll see that you're given the authority from Dr. Creed. It's a long job. Get busy."

He hung up and stopped a nurse who was passing. "Where can I find Dr. Tichman?"

The nurse indicated a door five removed from Dr. Hoyle's. Gillian went to it and knocked. An irritable voice said from inside, "Come in!"

Gillian opened the door and entered. Dr. Tichman was seated at his desk, looking pale and worn. When he saw Gillian he made an involuntary gesture of annoyance.

"I wonder," Gillian said amiably, "if you'd mind answering a few questions?"

"What are they?" the young man said curtly.

Gillian seated himself in a chair and asked quietly, "Do you think Starbuck killed Doctor Hoyle?"

The young man with the scar said irritably, "I haven't the faintest idea."

"Did you know that Starbuck drinks a great deal?"

Tichman's hypnotic black eyes narrowed. "Of course. He always has!"

"Ah! Drugs, too?"

"Yes."

"But," Gillian said, "this wasn't generally known, was it?"

"I doubt it."

"Did you like Starbuck?"

The dark young man raised his eyebrows. "I admired his ability. I can't say I liked him."

"Any particular reason?"

"None."

Gillian stood up. "Ah, well, I must

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be going. Thank you for your trouble, Dr. Tichman."

He went out and closed the door behind him. "Charming fellow," he murmured to himself, and shrugged his shoulders.

Gillian went on to Dr. Creed's office, where a secretary told him that Dr. Creed had collapsed and been taken to his house.

Gillian called at the house. Pompom answered his ring, and informed him that several doctors were with Dr. Creed in his bedroom.

The old man's voice came shrilly through the quiet house. "If that's Gillian Hazeltine, send him up here, Pompom!"

Gillian went up the stairs and into the bedroom. Dr. Creed looked to Gillian as if he would not live another hour.

His voice, however, when he ordered the doctors and nurses out of the room, was surprisingly strong.

When the door was closed, he said anxiously, "Gillian, did Dan kill that man?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Rockets

WE may get to the moon sooner than we expect. New rockets using liquid oxygen mixed with gasoline have made almost 750 miles an hour—and no wonder, for the combination is ten times as explosive as TNT. Such a rocket, writes a scientist in New Outlook magazine, could travel from Chicago to New York in twenty minutes, from there to England in two hours more. Vanes have been added in such a way that they become parachutes as the rocket falls and let it down easy.

A score of scientists who are studying this gadget have already found that human beings can endure the acceleration needed for a moon rocket—if the rocket can. Mail and transatlantic rockets we may be using within ten years. As for the skies—Edward L. Hanna of Cleveland has set aside $20,000 for the inventor who can plant his bones on the moon.

—*Delos White.*

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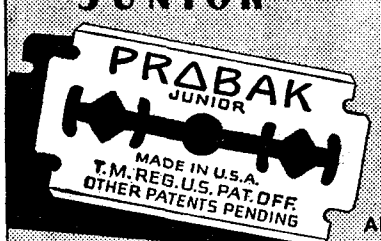

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Big Game

By JACK ALLMAN

Joe Massey of the Canadian Mounted was an expert game hunter—but his quarry this time was even more dangerous

The Lynx froze in his tracks

NO recruit fresh from the Regina training barracks of the Canadian Mounted Police ever wore his red tunic with more pride than Constable Joe Massey.

Yet this scarlet symbol of authority wasn't new to Joe. Four years he had, and all of them spent in Northwest Territories. Four years of hunting meat for the post, looking after the dogs, and caring for sick Indians.

Now he was getting his first real assignment. He was going out after big game—man. There was eagerness in every line of his erect figure as he took his orders.

"I don't have to tell you that this one they call the Lynx is bad," said the inspector. "Not with Margrave and Burr-Davis both shot from ambush while trailing him. And he appears to know every move we make. Must have someone keeping him informed."

Joe Massey nodded impatiently. He had been out hunting the day before when by moccasin telegraph, that mysteriously swift north woods communication system, word had come to the post that the fugitive was on his way down Stack River. As the last available man it was Joe's big chance and he was anxious to be on his way.

"If you don't catch up with him before he gets down there into that nest of lakes you'll never get him," continued the inspector. "Might just as well turn back before the ice ties you up."

He stuck out his hand. "Good luck,"

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he said. "You'll need it, Constable. You've been invaluable to the detachment as a game hunter, Massey. The best in the country, but just remember you aren't after meat for the pot this time. You're going on the trail of a crafty murderer who knows all the tricks of the country."

"I'll watch my step," said Joe. He returned the pressure of the other's hand, then hurried to his loaded canoe. There was a twenty-four-hour handicap on him already.

THE Lynx, safely concealed in a clump of willows near the head of the first lake, listened intently to every word his companion was saying. His wide, flattish face was set in hard lines and his small jet eyes, gifts of his half-breed mother, were narrowed slits.

"How do you know you're a day ahead?" he demanded.

"Because the inspector couldn't take up the trail on account of his broken arm, and I started out as soon as the word came in. The only man to follow you down here is that young Massey. He was out hunting caribou and wasn't due back till the next day."

"Massey!" The Lynx laughed. "I guess I sure crippled that detachment when I put Margrave and Burr-Davis out of the way. Massey, eh? Why, hell, he's nothing but a roustabout, game hunter, dog nurse. What the hell does he think he can do?"

The other shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "Of course, those other two were trained man hunters, but don't forget this Massey fellow was raised up in this country. He knows every trail and waterway."

"What of it? There's only one portage across to the Whitewater, ain't they? And when he comes along I'll be there waitin'. They'll learn to respect the Lynx before I get through with 'em. Massey! Hell!"

"Just the same . . ."

"Never mind trying to tell me. I know what I'm doing. Leave your canoe here and beat it back cross country. You can report it stolen while you was setting out a grayling net. How about grub?"

"Hardly any. I started out with enough, but like I told you, I capsized in Boulder Rapids. I salvaged a little, though."

The Lynx kept most of that little, and as the other struck off for the post along a dim Indian trail, he paddled rapidly down the lake into the face of the setting sun.

A WEEK later he was still sitting on a point that commanded a view of the portage, his rifle across his knees, watching, waiting; as motionless as the water-lapped root from which a curious mink looked at him with bright, shoe-button eyes.

Two days before he had had a glimpse of a scarlet-coated figure in a canoe that darted between two small islands. He'd show up again, and maybe the next time he'd be within rifle shot. The Lynx, so-called because that tassel-eared cat also strikes from ambush, had all the patience of his namesake.

A wedge of south-bound geese swept in and came to a honking rest in the marsh grass near by.

Except to remind him that his food supply was most gone they drew little attention from him.

And the ice growing out from the shore worried him, too. If that fool Mounty didn't show up again pretty soon they'd both be frozen in. Then he'd *have* to use one of his few shells to get meat. He didn't like that idea. He wanted to save all his bullets till he made sure of his big game—the Mounty.

The whispering leaves of lofty canoe birch were sifting down around him a couple of days later when suddenly there came to his ears an unmistakable sound. He cocked his head, listened. It came again, clear and sharp on the wings of the stiff October breeze—the call of a rutting moose.

He jumped to his feet, hesitated. There was the cheapest meat a bullet could buy; perhaps a thousand pounds with one shell. But did he dare risk firing? The call came

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again and he made particular note of the direction.

Sure. Why not? As soon as he dropped the moose he'd conceal himself near the carcass. Then if the Mounty came to investigate the shot he'd let him have it, too. Just as well there as at the portage.

Cautiously he followed up the repeated calls, through the groves of birch, through clumps of stunted spruce, treading the fallen leaves and needles with all the stealth of a predatory animal of the woods.

Closer and closer he came, and at last he spotted the source. It came from a thicket at the bottom of a spring-fed swale. With his rifle held in readiness in case the big fellow should bolt he crept up.

One last call shattered the stillness. He almost imagined he could hear the sharp hoof pawing at the moss. His fingers tightened around his gun. He parted the underbrush. Gasped. Froze in his tracks.

He was looking into the muzzle of Joe Massey's carbine, and it wasn't ten feet away. A determined blue eye was threaded through the sights. He dropped his own rifle at the crisp command, and then his eyes became glued to the megaphone-like birch bark horn at the Mounty's feet. He knew what it was; had used one many times himself while hunting moose. If one could imitate a bull well enough it would bring a challenger from as far as it could be heard.

Joe kicked the horn aside with the toe of his boot.

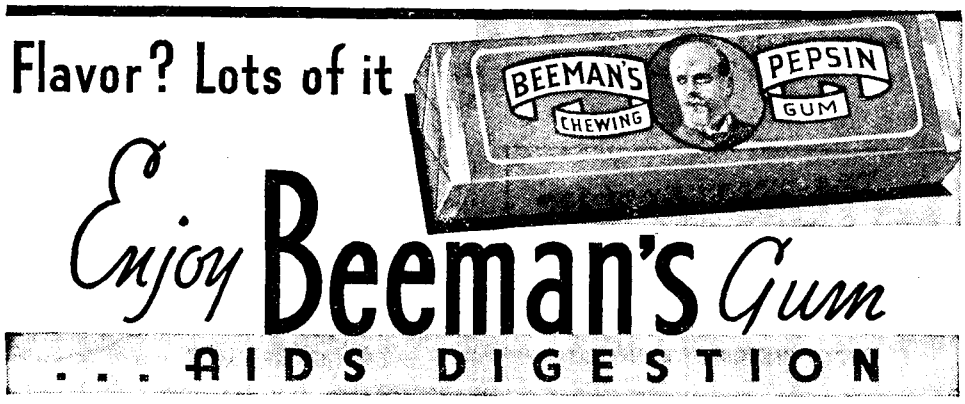
"I couldn't go and get you, Mr. Lynx," he said, "so I just figured to call you to me. Guess you're about the biggest game that ever answered one of those things."

THE END

Pole-Vaulting Peasants

TRAVELERS claim that the world's most pole-vaulting people are the Friesians of northern Germany, though not because they're abnormally fond of athletics. Their country is marshy and full of ditches—too full of them, apparently, because there are not always enough foot-bridges. Hence the vaulting-pole, which the Friesian peasants are supposed to use with great skill—men, women and children. At the foot of the pole is a disk to prevent it from sinking into the mud.

—*J. W. Holden.*



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Revolt in Ventura

Long Novelette

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "The Drums Roar," "Heads to Win," etc.

When these soldiers of fortune pooled their stakes and shouted "War is swell," they could have stormed the very gates of hell

CHAPTER I.

DOUBLE-CROSSED.

SUDDENLY, as though breaking through an invisible barrier, the ship had entered into warm weather. The sky had become a sharp, clear blue flecked only by small clouds; the sea was a shimmering blue plain marbled with soft veins of molten silver.

Frank Crown lifted his head, smiling, the sub-machine gun propped against his knees. But the other two men who worked here with him, Flopsy Tinna, the big, somber ex-gangster, and Samuel, the little, bow-legged Negro who had spent most of his life as a trooper in the United States Cavalry, seemed occupied for the most part with their

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The young Colonel died in his saddle

own thoughts and their own work at clearing the cosmolined guns.

Crown hunched the finished gun aside, changed his position a bit where he sat against the poop deck-house, so he was further out in the bland warmth of the sunlight. It was his sensation that he had been running, had been pursued for a very long time, and only now was given a chance to pause, gather his breath and gauge who his pursuers were, and why he had run.

He looked around him again at the small and drab ship he and the other men with him had entered into last night off Ambrose Lightship and New York Harbor. He gave another oblique, speculative glance at the gangster, Tinna, and the little Negro, Samuel, thinking also of the other three men who formed the rest of their party. It had all happened very swiftly, very strangely, he told himself. It was time he checked back now, if it was not already too late. But, the thought came rapidly to him, his reasons for being here were really very simple and logical.

Because he, Frank Crown, had soldiered nearly all his mature life. War had been his trade, his single occupation. He had been a first lieutenant in a combat division of the American Expeditionary Force, then a member of the Army of Occupation in Germany. After that, undesirous of taking up any other trade, and knowing no other, he had joined the French Foreign Legion.

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And only a severe leg wound he had suffered in the fighting of the French colonial forces against the last of the hostile tribes in Morocco had forced him from the Legion and back into civilian life and what he knew now had been an almost laughably pitiable attempt as a chicken farmer in Northern Connecticut.

He had been more than glad to gain another chance to go to war. He had been quite boyishly pleased at the first ideas of being what he told himself, laughing, the romantic writers called a soldier of fortune. Yet this job was not twenty-four hours old, and already he was afraid of it, directly disturbed and made wary by the events and implications of things beyond his present understanding which had happened in that time.

Last night, just at dusk, he had been hired again as a soldier, an officer. That had happened in New York, in the strangest set of circumstances he had ever encountered. His offer to soldier again had come, he had finally found, from a man named Eulastasio Vigin. Vigin was the accredited and accepted consul to New York for the Central American banana republic of Ventura. Yet Vigin had hired him, Crown, the big man, Tinna, and two more as officers for the revolutionary army which would overthrow the regular existent government.

Crown and the others had come together and been engaged in Vigin's consular office off lower Broadway. Crown had met the others there for the first time. The Negro, little Samuel, was the first one he had met, coming from the street into the vaguely lighted, shabby and drafty lobby of the old loft building. Samuel ran the freight elevator in the building, although, Crown knew now, the Negro had served with Vigin for years. Samuel had worn a huge blue apron and a crack-brimmed derby hat, and still wore the hat now. But he had greeted Crown quietly and with ease, admitted immediately that he knew who Crown was, and had been waiting for him. As they rose together on the freight elevator toward Vigin's office, Samuel also admitted that he was carrying a .45 automatic pistol in a shoulder holster inside the disguising apron. "Just in case, *teniente*," he explained. "Because I been at this business a long time; not much cash, an' all carry . . ."

THE rest was as weird as that: Vigin's outer office, marked by a cracked enamel plaque bearing the arms of Ventura, was a fiercely lighted place laden with a litter of martial and commercial samples designed for sale in the Central and South Americas. Tables bearing sub-machine guns, rifles, carbines and hand grenades rested next to displays of red and white leather firemen's hats, hip boots and shiny models of hook-and-ladder engines.

Vigin himself was a man of unusual appearance. He was broadly, heavily set, the formation of his head and features, his skin coloration showing his mixture of Spanish, Indian and Negro bloods. He was dressed in a tight black jacket which was set off with braid an inch thick and a puffed cravat of half a dozen prismatic shades. His trousers were fawn-colored, striped with bold black patterns, but worn short enough to show long, pointed shoes of black patent leather trimmed with red kid and pearl buttons. Crown had smelled perfume upon him the instant he came forth from the inner office to meet him. But the man's hand grip was tremendously strong,

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the hand broad and heavy, even calloused. And immediately he talked business, offered one smiling sentence in commiseration about Crown's wounded leg, then brought him into the inner office to meet what Vigin referred to, with a wide Latin gesture, as "the future officers of the Army of Liberty."

Three men were in that room. Vigin presented them to Crown one by one, and with difficulty Crown had kept himself from laughing. Because none of those men there looked like soldiers, nor had they anything about them which seemed to Crown to be a part of the martial manner. The first of them had sat slouched against the table, his head nearly in his hands, until Vigin spoke and he turned slowly, gaping, his mouth and eyes twitching, and rose stumbling to his feet. It was Crown's impression that he met the ghost of a man. For the other's eyes, face and hair were dull, almost lifeless, possessed of a drab gray color. His suit was an excellent tweed, but it was stained, frayed, and through the cracks of the shoes Crown saw bare skin.

"Colonel Mauran O'Doghue," Vigin said with unctuous formality. Then, as he and Crown went on toward the other two men, he spoke in a swift whisper. "Maybe the fellow doesn't look it, Crown. But the man's got a record as long as your two arms. A colonel—a real colonel—of Imperial Lancers; India, and Palestine, and Egypt, France. *Nombre!* And enough medals to make you bowlegged . . ."

But then, right before them, another man jumped up from the table, smacking his heels together and bowing from the waist with jerky exaggeration. "General Domeros," Vigin said in introduction. "General Vicente Jesulito Domeros, a true Dominican son of liberty. A soldier of fortune and general officer in half a dozen armies. A general of brigade in the Royal Serbian Army during the World War. But perhaps you have read some of the general's experiences in the popular magazines, or seen some of his work from Hollywood."

CROWN'S desire to laugh was greatest then. General Vicente Jesulito Domeros, the true son of liberty and general of brigade in the Serbian Army was dressed in a suit which was brighter than Vigin's cravat, his thick, curly black hair gleamed and reeked with a plastering of pomade, and imitation diamonds were on his fingers and in his tie. But then the third man, Flopsy Tinna, spoke from where he had come slowly, grinning, to his feet at the end of the table.

"Let 'm be, Vigin. Youse'll talk the guy's ears offa his head. Flopsy Tinna; that's me, fella. Machine guns. Chi', an' Saint Louis and this town. How ya comin'? An' when we pullin' out?"

Vigin smiled also then, but briefly. "As soon as I have come to an agreement with Lieutenant Crown," he said. "When will you be ready to leave, Lieutenant?"

"As soon as I know the amount of my pay, and the details of the job," Crown answered flatly.

Vigin waved his hand again, toward two empty chairs beyond Tinna. "Sit down, Lieutenant, and let me tell you . . . How does four hundred dollars, American gold, a month, sound to you?"

"That sounds all right," Crown told him. "But, how about the job? All I know is the couple of vague cracks for former officers you've made in your ads in the papers, and the letter I got telling me to come here today."

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"The job . . ." Vigin was sitting back in his chair, his big hands up calmly on the table before him. "The job is really very simple. It is revolution—against the existing government of Ventura. That may surprise you, and I admit I can see why. Here in the Venturan consulate and hearing such words from the man who is supposed to be the Venturan consul. But, have you ever heard or read of a man named Bichi Yacatel?"

"The guy," answered Frank Crown, simply, "who's been the president, the dictator, of Ventura for almost thirty years. Sure; he runs the country, all but owns it."

Vigin smiled, and slightly lifted the thumbs of his hands. "Exactly," he said. "Yacatel has done that. But, he will not go on. And here is why, Lieutenant. Yacatel is a man of pure Indian blood, a brute, a primitive savage. A man who rose out of the jungle bush and finally looted and took all of Ventura as he first looted peasant houses. But Yacatel is getting old, and he has never married, and he has never trusted any other man—killed or driven out any other who might have as much strength as himself. Now he's getting old, though, and the last few years of his life begin to seem very nice in prospect—out of Ventura and in peace in Paris. But in Paris with lots of money."

"The old story," said Frank Crown. "Run when it's getting too hot."

"The old story," Vigin repeated after him. "But a good deal different in this case. Because Yacatel never got enough money out of Ventura to keep him in Paris as he wants to be kept. But, although he has never married, Yacatel has been what might be called a prolific man. Yacatel has had at least eighty-seven illegitimate sons whom he is now quite willing to recognize and make legally his heirs."

"A kind of syndicate," suggested Crown quietly.

"*Si*," Vigin said. "*Si, si!* A syndicate of eighty-seven tough, eager and now penniless men who will be glad, when Yacatel has jammed the necessary legislation through, to run the country for him—and pay him his price in Paris, and get their own, too. Perhaps you understand now why I am disloyal to my consular duties, and to any government run by such a man."

"I've got," said Crown, "a pretty good idea. When do you want to go, and how?"

"At once," Vigin said. "Yacatel has forced a meeting of the Senate for next week. I plan to sail tonight—with you gentlemen and over fifty submachine guns, half a dozen cases of grenades, more than two thousand rifles and fifty thousand rounds of both machine gun and rifle ammunition. I have a launch ready, waiting for us in the North River, and a ship off Sandy Hook. Are you ready to go now, Lieutenant?"

CROWN smiled, at himself, and at the other's man's suave insistence.

"My gear is all up at the hotel," he said. "I haven't even got my pistol with me." Then, though, he saw Vigin's hand outstretched toward him, took and shook it. "Okay," he said. "Say when . . ."

"In less than an hour," Vigin answered. "I will send right away to the hotel for your things. But now let us have a drink, several drinks. To *libertad y paz*, eh? And to *le buena fortuna!*"

They left there much less than an hour later, in a truck which met them in an alley behind the old, dark build-

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ing and carried them and the carefully canvased guns and ammunition to the river. It was fully dark by then, and a cold, bitter wind blew upon the river as they slanted forth into it in the big launch Vigin helmed and which they had loaded deeply from the truck.

FRANK CROWN

Crown's memory now was that he had laughed, and felt quite gay, when they first came out into the river. It was his impression that they raced in the powerful, lightless launch along a deep corridor that was floored with black velvet and walled with gold. But then, where he stood in the after part of the cockpit among the canvased piles of arms, the big man, Tinna, and the strange, wraith-like O'Doghue and Domeros, he also saw the lights of the police launch cutting out from a slip on the Manhattan side. Tinna, the gangster, had seen them first; spoke hoarsely to Vigin forward at the wheel and little Samuel, crouched down over the motor.

Vigin's head jerked up, and back. He swore in Spanish, and then swung, his lips slack and soundless for an instant as he gazed toward the two other and lightless launches now sweeping out from a darkened stretch of the Jersey shore. Words which were not curses broke from him; he spoke to the men behind: "They are after us. Somebody has double-crossed us. They want this load we've got. Seventeen thousand dollars' worth—they want that!"

"Nuts!" Flopsy Tinna told him. "Let 'em come an' get it! We ain't the Boy Scouts. But who tipped off th' cop launch we was goin' to roll down here?" He wheeled, almost before he was through speaking, not waiting for Vigin's response, and grabbed powerfully out at the slight-bodied and tensely crouching former general, Vicente Jesulito Domeros. "Youse!" he said to Domeros. "They tipped th' mitt t' me in the town about youse before I left. They called youse fer a cheap, two-timin' muzzler. You in on this? You rig this job?"

Domeros gave a cry almost like a scream, and tried to get back from him. But Tinna had him, hit his face with two flat and awful, open-handed blows, then whipped his fingers in and jerked the pistol from Domeros's pocket. He laughed as he lifted the pistol, cracked Domeros under the chin with the butt of it, knocked the small man headlong and loose back into the stern. "Stay there, fer now," he said. "Yuh yella rat!"

AT his feet, Crown and the Irishman, O'Doghue, were already dragging away the tarpaulins from the cases of guns and ammunition, ripping at the planks of the tops. Crown cursed as he worked: the first case was full of grenades, the second and the third with sub-machine guns and rifles thick with protective cosmoline. "All right," he said, speaking to Tinna and to O'Doghue. "Find what the hell you can in there. That guy

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on the first launch has got an auto-rifle, but—" He broke his words off, lifting the German stick grenade up in his hands.

There were men all along the cabin trunk and hood of both those launches which had come out so swiftly from the Jersey side. And both those complements were firing now, one swinging off to block and hold back the police launch, the other, with the automatic-rifle gunner hunched up in the bow, cutting directly across their own path.

The automatic-rifle gunner had stopped firing for an instant; he was shouting at them. He was telling them not to be saps, and to hand over the guns before the police launch got there; that was all they wanted. Frank Crown laughed at him. Splinters from that man's last burst had pierced his skin from his knees to his shoulders. Crown balanced the unfamiliar grenade for just a fraction of a second more, spreading his legs to the bucking of the swerving launch, inhaling a great breath. Then he pulled the grenade cord, counting silently, "One, two, three!" He threw up and out, in a flat arc. "*Avec rien du nouveau!*" he shouted as he threw, remembering an old Legion phrase of welcome.

The grenade exploded perhaps two or three feet above the cabin roof of that other launch. It flowered pale blue, green and silver about a violent heart of brilliant carmine. The light it gave for an instant showed black, broken bodies, the fragments of the launch. Then the river was dark again, and they were racing on, free for the sea, the big gray police launch on a long, lunging slant after the other craft towards the Jersey side.

From there on Crown's memory was not very exact. He remembered, of course, clearing the Narrows past the forts, the dim shapes of Coney Island and Sandy Hook, then the lightship, the pilot yachts and the open sea, where up out of the mists, this small, rusty-sided ship had risen abruptly, pitching sharply at her shortened anchor cable.

Since then, nothing which had any part of the violence of last night had happened. Almost immediately after coming over the side with Vigin, he went to the room assigned to him and Flopsy Tinna, turned in, refusing to listen more than briefly to the gangster's hoarse insinuations about treachery by the strange little man, Domeros, or even Vigin.

Smiling at the gun he lifted again into his hands, and out at the soft sea, Crown rose to his feet and spoke to Tinna and the black trooper: "Come on, gents. Let's take these pieces forward now and get them out of the damp before chow-time. This job is getting to be more like a pleasure cruise all the time. If we don't look out, Vigin will be feeding us caviar next."

"Not," grunted Tinna, slouching along behind him up the deck, "any caviar, guy. . . Not yet, an' not from Vigin. Maybe I got acid stomach, but this job don't all look so good t' me as you; let's wait until we're there, an' done th' fightin', an' got paid fer it, before we start clappin' hands. . ."

CHAPTER II.

"WAR SHOULD BE SWELL."

THE night out there was like an immense and cloaking sheet of black velvet now, and the dim downthrust of the deck-light at the end of the alleyway right outside showed them nothing except the steel deck and red-leaded bulwark flanking

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it. But there in the saloon, they could hear clearly the creak and clatter of gear, the thumped clanking of the winches of the stopped ship, and the cries of the men working at the opened midships hatch and then below, in the boat which had just come alongside and now was receiving the arms and ammunition.

Slowly, Frank Crown moved back from the bulkhead and to the table again, and the others followed him. For a moment, in silence, he stared at them, Tinna and O'Doghue, and the Negro, Samuel, recalling vividly what had happened here four nights ago, and how simply Vigin had tricked them.

It had been at dinner, right after he and Tinna and then Samuel had entered this room after finishing their work on the guns. Domeros and the gray-headed Irishman, O'Doghue, had been at the table already, and they had both been very drunk, a litter of partly empty bottles before them. Then, from the bridge, Vigin had come in, and Domeros had lurched to his feet and announced that he was a former general of brigade, was the ranking officer here, and as such should sit at the head of the table, the others around him, all the others but Tinna. Tinna, he said, was a rotten alley-rat, and should not eat with officers and gentlemen, but with the mess-boys, or alone, on deck.

Tinna had laughed, oddly and softly, at that. In a slow voice, he had told Domeros just what he knew about him; he called the trembling and now rapidly sobered man a liar and a cheap crook; he told him, "Youse 're only here, you muzzler, because th' coppers in New York are after yuh fer some cheap petty larceny job—swipin' the fur coat offa some kid who was sap enough t' keep youse in coffee an' cakes. But, grab fer that gun yuh got; don't talk no more hooey. Grab fer it—an' I'll blow yer top off!"

Domeros, hysterical, semi-insane in that moment, had grabbed for it, and Tinna's big hand had gone instantly for his own pistol. But then, from behind, Frank Crown had fired a snap shot over Tinna's head, a shot that had smacked the little man, Domeros, around and down with a superficial shoulder wound, in the second or so before the big gangster would have killed him.

There had been little more to it. Cursing Tinna for a fool, Crown had gone to bend down over the wounded man, the gangster behind him, when Vigin had spoken from behind, at the door. Vigin stood in the doorway, a pistol in each hand and the ship's captain and two of the deck officers, all bearing Vigin's shiny new rifles, right in in front of him. Vigin had laughed at all of them then, and told them he would kill them if any of them moved and went for their pistols. Smiling, Vigin ordered the captain and the deck officers to take all their weapons, bring Domeros out and away, then lock and leave the rest of them here, in captivity.

"For you are a pack of stupid, savage fools," he told them, backing out of the door. "You are simply stupid, gentlemen. . ."

And now, Frank Crown thought, Vigin was leaving them, and these men here looked to him as their leader, had come to do so tacitly in the four days they had been confined in the limits of this little, stuffy room. "There goes Vigin," he said, speaking to all of them. "He's saying good-by to the captain now. Those must be his pals, who've just come out, and are

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taking him and the stuff ashore. And that must be Nuevitas, in there."

LITTLE, black Samuel nodded then, Crown's eyes upon him. "That's it, *teniente*. I know; I been he', with Vigin, when he was still one part honest. This Nuevitas is an ole town; she got a stink like no othe' place, not even like Manila in the ole days. . ."

Mauran O'Doghue was stirring slightly where he sat. "The door," he said in a whispering voice. "We can use the chairs, here. Two men at one door, two at the other. Because that swine has completely sold us out, left us flat. This captain will just turn us over to the police in the next port he comes to; we've no passports, no papers—"

"Sit still!" Frank Crown ordered him quietly. "Listen. That boat's just pulled away; Vigin's gone. But I think Domeros is aboard still; Vigin would have no reason to take him with him. And some guy is there at the after door now. . ."

The after door opened slowly. Domeros stood on deck right beyond it. He wore what was obviously one of the ship's officers' nightshirts, a voluminous garment made vivid by red and green candy stripes. His feet and legs were bare, his face yellowly haggard, and through the wide neck of the nightshirt the men in the room could see the wad of bandages about his right shoulder. With the long and unsure steps of a man who had not been out of bed for days, he advanced into the room. He walked right past Frank Crown; he did not seem to see him. He walked directly to Flopsy Tinna, stopped before him. His head was suddenly inclined in a nod, his hand out.

"I'm sorry," he said. "That is the first reason why I have come here. We—both of us—have acted like complete fools. Because I know now that Vigin tricked us, you and me, and all of us. And he's gone. But now—"

"Hooey, guy," Flopsy Tinna said. He had taken Domeros's hand very much as he would take the hand of some old and very sick woman whom he pitied if he did not understand. "Ferget that. But, how c'n we get to Vigin? You know?"

Domeros took his eyes from Tinna's glance and gave his bleak, quick smile to the other men also. "I have just been talking to the captain of the ship," he said softly. "The captain is willing to talk now; Vigin didn't pay him all he promised, held out at the last moment. You see, there's no war in Ventura. Yacatel, the president, made a cash settlement and a promise of immunity with all the revolutionary leaders the day we left New York. But Vigin was stuck with us, the guns he'd bought for a war here, the launch and the ship he'd hired. At the last moment, he tried to make a deal with some big Jersey gang to take the guns off his hands, but their price wasn't high enough and he refused it.

"That—" Domeros was staring levelly into Tinna's eyes again now—"was the reason for the hi-jacking job in the river; that gang tried to get the guns anyhow. So Vigin had to come along South, and as soon as he was on the ship, he talked with his two pals down here, Romeran, the *commandante* of the garrison in Nuevitas, and Tiego, the collector and harbor-master of the port. Right from the beginning, he was planning to get rid of us. . . And it was Romeran and Tiego who came out and got him and the arms now; I imagine they will sell them, or use them in another threat to shake Yacatel

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down. But the captain of the ship is a practical man; he says that for a hundred dollars, he will put us all ashore here. He has suggested, of course, that we might have reason to want to see Vigin again . . ."

Domeros stopped, and made a slow, unconsciously expressive gesture with his hands. "I have no money at all," he said. "But I have my rings, and my stickpin, and—"

"Cut it out, will ya?" It was Flopsy Tinna who had spoken, pushing back from the middle of the table the thin, meticulously folded sheaf of three ten dollar bills Frank Crown had just pushed there. He was squatting on a corner of the settee now and rapidly whipping off his trousers. "I may 'a' had t' take it on th' lam up North from a job, but I got a pile o' potatoes fer doin' it. An' I planted them right in the seat o' me pants; a guy might plug youse, er two-time youse like Vigin, but only a low-down, real rat'll swipe a guy's drawers . . . Here!" From against the lining of the thick woolen underwear, he was ripping a neatly stitched packet of bills. "Here's a nice, fresh 'C' note fer this dill-docks runnin' the boat. Youse boys keep that small feed fer papers 'n' cigarettes. But, how about it, Crown? Youse 're the guy runnin' this now. Do you want this donkey t' put us on th' beach here?"

FRANK CROWN sat very still, and silent, for several minutes, his eyes glancing from them and down on the faded design of the turkey carpet covering the deck. Swiftly, from the strange days of their intense intimacy here, he remembered what he knew of these men; of Mauran O'Doghue, who after half a lifetime of truly magnificent service had been retired because of wounds and returned to his native Ireland and there inevitably drawn into his land's bitter struggle for freedom until, at last, in the Black and Tan fighting, he had contrived and commanded the ambushing of officers and men with whom he had fought side by side in other and far happier wars. O'Doghue had balanced all his loyalties, all his life in that moment, and did not know now whether he had won or lost, but only that he could not, and would never, return to Ireland again, and that his life had seemed utterly worthless to him ever since. They, the others, were quite like that, all of them, himself included: Domeros, who had stolen the fur coat of a girl who had protected and kept him; little and black Samuel, who wore an Army automatic underneath his work apron while running a freight elevator in a New York loft building; Tinna, who wanted to stand and shoot it out for once, instead of "takin' it on th' lam." Domeros would have died the other night here, if only to preserve what he thought to be the last of his honor as an officer and a gentleman, and Tinna's hundred dollar note, gained God knew how, was there on the table now.

Frank Crown looked up, and smiled at them. "Sure," he said. "Let's go. We came here for war. If Vigin's cut us out of one, let's go make our own. I don't know this country; I've never been in here before, but there must be some folks in the place who honestly want to get this chiselling murderer, Yacatel, out, and who weren't as satisfied as Vigin and his pal with a cash shakedown. Yacatel's still president; the job's still there to be done."

Sammy Samuel was grinning until his stub, yellow back teeth showed. "*Teniente,*" he said, "sure! Yes, sir, an' all day long! They's one ole lady, but a right smart one an' shrewder than

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a damn' smart fox. Mammy Yacatel, I mean. Bichi Yacatel's maw. But she sure hates her son, an' him her. Because, 'way back, Bichi killed his ole man, clipped him down with a *machete* when Bichi was still nothin' but a cheap bush bandit out in th' jungle. Bichi would 'a' killed her long ago, too, if he wasn't so afraid o' her, an' all she got on him. Folks like her, too; she's a straight bush Indian, an' she lets Bichi know it ever' now an' then. She lives right in Nuevitas. I know where, an' she knows me; shucks, she knows ev'y guy that's ever been in th' country, an' a lot that ain't. You want I should take you an' us all there now, *teniente?*"

"That," said Frank Crown, getting to his feet, Tinna's hundred dollar note in his hand, "is just the one thing I do want. And right away, as soon as Domeros and I have gone up and given this skipper the hundred bucks that says we go ashore."

"Atta baby!" Flopsy Tinna stood stretching his arms and his legs after the days of close confinement. "Because, girls, this here war should be swell!"

CHAPTER III.

LA DOÑA YACATEL.

THE others, with Samuel and the tall, heavily armed Negro servant who had brought them in from the garden gate of this old, hidden house in Nuevitas, had left him at the door of the brightly lit room. Now Crown advanced alone into it. The chair in which la Doña Yacatel, the mother of the president of Ventura, sat was immense, made from worked rattan almost in the shape of a fan. La Doña Yacatel was quite unbelievably small and old. She sat in the chair like some incredible child dressed in formal black woman's clothing of another generation. For the small, dark eyes were intensely alight and swift, and the voice which had commanded Crown to advance from the door, quite shrill. But then, beneath the folds of the beautifully worked black lace *mantilla* drawn closely about the head, Crown could see the cheeks, haggardly taut against the high cheek-bones, but as dark and lined and relined as the bark of some jungle tree, and the mouth, thin-lipped, hard, pursed now in the arrogant kind of calm smiling that could only arrive from an inner and ancient knowledge of many faces, many men and wars.

"What," she asked him when he had stopped directly before her, "do you want in Nuevitas? And how did you get here?"

"I came," Frank Crown said in slow, difficult Spanish, "with a number of other men—those you saw at the door when I entered. And with

GENL. VICENTE DOMEROS

one other, Eulastasio Vigin. In New York, Vigin hired us for a revolution here. He brought us South on a ship. Four days ago, he tricked us, locked us in a room on the ship. Tonight, he

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deserted us, and came ashore, with the guns and ammunition he told us in New York were to be used in the war here. Now, we want to find Vigin—and settle up with him. Maybe that would mean a war. But, we came for a war; all of us have been soldiers."

Beneath the beautiful folds of her lace-trimmed *manton,* la Doña Yacatel lifted and moved one unseen hand a little bit. "I shall speak to you in French if you speak that language," she said. "I am an old woman, and your Spanish gives me a headache. . . But, why have you come to me? And where is this man, Vigin, now?"

"Because," Frank Crown told her, smiling slightly, and speaking in his Legion French, "that little Negro, Samuel, said he knew you, and that—frankly—you hated your son, the president, would not be unhappy if he were overthrown and chased out of the country. Vigin, I think, is still here in Nuevitas; the ship just got in less than an hour ago."

La Doña Yacatel's eyes were like beautiful imitations made of steel. "Vigin is a cheap thief," she said. "And the son of a sow. And my son, the President, murdered his own father—the one man I have ever loved. Part of the money for these guns Vigin bought in New York was mine. But who met Vigin, and brought those arms ashore?"

"I'm not certain. But the captain of the ship named two men: Romeran, the *commandante* of the local garrison, and a fellow called Tiego, who is supposed to be the harbor master and customs collector of the port."

La Doña Yacatel moved her hand again with the same small gesture. "I am certain: Romeran and Tiego would be the two men to help Vigin. It is they who must have made the secret peace with my son, Yacatel, four days ago, and got a huge cash price for doing it. But, you say you want your price from Vigin, and that you want war. Could you win a war in this country, if you had those arms Vigin brought South, and say four hundred absolutely trustworthy and fearless men behind you?"

Frank Crown smiled. "I've never been South of Florida before," he said. "I haven't even more than seen a military map of this place. But those are very good guns Vigin has, and if you can get them, and the men. . ."

"I CAN get them," she said, her voice low, a whisper, "and I will tell you how. Because Vigin is really a stupid man, and any success he has had has been through treachery. You might have already guessed that yourself. And Romeran and Tiego, these two local thieves, could not have paid him much of a price for the guns he was all but forced to put in their hands. Vigin would love to trick them, and gain more money. He is afraid of them, and he is afraid of my son, the president, who is an unforgiving man. And, up here in the *tierra alta,* the high country, there are several American and British owned coffee *fincas.* My son has given those foreign owners a lot of trouble; he has overtaxed them greatly, and he has stolen their field-hands time and again for his army. So, in the last two years, those people have imported East Indian laborers, big, fine men, most of whom, I have taken the trouble to find out, have seen miiltary service at one time or another in the Indian Army. You begin to understand me?"

"I begin to understand," said Frank Crown gravely, "that you know a lot more about me and the men with me

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than I thought when I first came in."

Beneath the *mantilla* fringe, her strange eyes turned, and she gave him a dim and brief smile. "Romeran and Tiego," she said, "made their terms of peace with my son very quickly here. Before they did, Vigin was forced to tell me what kind of men he was hiring with my money, and what kind of guns he had bought. Who was the sad, gray man, the tall one, with you at the door?"

"O'Doghue," Crown told her, all sensation of surprise gone from him now. "An Irishman, a former colonel in the Indian Army."

"O'Doghue," she said after him. "Colonel Mauran O'Doghue. And the girl he is supposed to have married in Ireland has been living here for the last four years; her father runs one of the big foreign *fincas* between here and Palos Altos, the capital. That girl is here in my house now; no doubt she is with O'Doghue, for she came down yesterday to stay here with me, her best friend, and wait to meet that man. But, let me tell you the rest briefly, *M'sieur le Capitaine*. To take this country, a man must take only one town—Palos Altos, the capital. That is the key to all the rest; my son has his best, regularly paid troops there. But he has also on his hands the new American and British ministers, young men, who have been sent here to watch their nationals' interests, and see that my son has the right sort of successor—when he goes. So you need not worry, if you win your war, with Vigin's guns, and my army of East Indian field-hands, that you will have to become president of a country you never saw before. But you may leave me now; I wish to speak with this sad Irishman, Colonel O'Doghue, and his girl. You will probably find the other officers in the *sala*, where my servants have taken them to eat. But eat quickly, Captain; while you are gone, I am going to send for our friend, the former consul to New York. And if he is still in Nuevitas, he will come; he fears me just enough. *Bon appetit!*"

"*Merci, madame,*" Frank Crown said quietly, bowing before her.

IN the big and dark-wooded dining *sala*, guided by one of the hulking Negro servants who seemed to be everywhere in this tremendous and sprawling old house, Crown found Domeros, Tinna and Samuel. Food, wine and beer, a heap of cigarettes and cigars rested before them. They were freshly shaven and bathed, smiled at him before he could say a word, pointed to the food and drink. But he laughed aloud at them:

"You guys put more trust in God than France does in the Legion. How do you know that chow isn't poisoned, or that the old lady isn't going to turn you over right away to one of her son's firing squads?"

"Nuts," said Flopsy Tinna: "how do you know I ain't that guy, th' Archangel Gabriel? Sit down an' stuff yer face; old dolls like that ain't even wastin' unpoisoned food on mugs like us unless she can use us right. How they comin', big?"

"They will be big," Frank Crown said, sitting to reach for a platter of sliced meat and yams, "and a whole lot bigger after I've whipped through some of this and get back, for just one more little talk." He ate in silence then, rapidly, and was through, just reaching for a cigarette, when the big servant came to the door of the room again. "*Usted, Señor el Capitan,*" he said to Crown. "It is the *Señora.*"

"Keep 'em all in th' infield, baby,"

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Flopsy Tinna told him as he stood and started towards the door. "I ain't seen Irish for about a half an hour, but this here's beginnin' to look like a real ball club now. . ."

The servant who had preceded him stopped at the door; Crown went on into the big room again alone. La Doña Yacatel sat in the same posture in the chair. She looked instantly up at him and gave him that cold, nearly motionless and mirthless smile.

"Your Irish Colonel is a charming man," she told him. "And, in a little while I believe he will be a much happier one. But Vigin is coming now; he should be here right away. 'Tonio!" The black servant moved as if released from an immense spring, was forward in the room and at her side instantly. "Give your pistol to *Señor el Capitan,*" she commanded him. "Then you will go to the rear gate in the garden and admit Señor Vigin. You will bring him here, and then you will leave, and shut the door, and stand right outside it."

"*Sí, señora.*" With the quickness of old habit, the man palmed a Luger automatic out from an inside shoulder holster, extended it, butt first, to Crown, then swung towards the door. Holding the pistol, hefting it in his hand for an instant to be sure it was loaded and that he was certain of its balance, Crown was aware that la Doña Yacatel's eyes were lightly upon him.

"You are not to shoot Vigin with that gun," she told him. "Not unless he makes some gesture of violence towards me, or sees you behind that screen there. Get behind that screen, *mon beau Capitaine.* But don't worry; within an hour, I hope, you will be spilling a little blood for me and for yourself. . ."

The screen was perhaps fifteen feet from where she sat, on an angle from her chair and from the one door into the room. It was tall, and heavy, richly carved from some dark tropic wood in an intricate design. But, stepping behind it, Frank Crown found that cleverly designed eye-holes had been worked in the design, and that standing there he was given a full view of the door and of the space around the chair. Several times, as he waited, he tried drawing the Luger down as he stepped rapidly sidewise to clear his range and the screen, was content and calm when he heard the Negro servant rapping on the door, then the door being opened.

VIGIN stood in the doorway, entered alone, and the door was shut behind him. The man was dressed in a fresh suit of whites, a light blue silk shirt and matching tie, carried an expensive *jipijapa* hat in one hand. But lines dragged at the corners of his eyes and mouth.

As he advanced towards the fan-shaped chair his strides and posture were those of a sorely defeated, fatigued and unhappy man.

He stopped and bowed low before the chair, took the small hand held forth to him, brushed it with his thick lips. "*Señora,*" he said.

"Señor Vigin," the piping voice answered him. "You are not late in getting here?"

"I have just arrived, *Señora.*" Vigin was standing back a pace or so. In a glance he perhaps could not restrain, he searched the room with narrowed, watchful eyes. "I have been delayed in arriving," he went on then. "I could not get here sooner; am very lucky to be here now. . . There has been treachery, *Señora.*"

"I have suspected that," the thin,

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high voice slowly pronounced. "But, you have had no part in that?"

"I, *señora?*" Vigin lifted one hand, as if to place the extended fingers indignantly against his breast, then stopped himself short, his glance meeting fully the eyes of the woman in the chair. "How could I? Tonight, only a little over an hour ago, I landed here from New York. . . I carried through my part of the bargain, *señora,* my part of the plan as far as it was possible."

"Where are the guns and ammunition, where are the *e'tranjero* officers who were going to lead the troops?"

Vigin made another gesture, one of distinct tragedy. "All of them I brought here, right to Nuevitas, *señora.* And Romeran and Tiego met me, as had been agreed. But they told me peace had been made, days before, and that there was to be no war. Your son, they told me, has paid several millions for peace. But those two, they told me, have still their jobs as *commandante* and collector of the port, have not so far been accused of connection with the revolution. So we were able to bring those guns ashore."

"Romeran and Tiego were, you mean."

"*Sí, señora;* in truth, that is much more correct."

"And how much did they pay you before you would deliver them over to them?"

"*Señora,*" asked Vigin, his voice dully harsh, "do you think me a little boy, or a coward and a fool?"

Quite gently, la Doña Yacatel smiled at him. "None of those things, *señor.* But, I must trust you now, and you in turn must trust me. Things are not too well for any of us, and you have tried trusting those other two, and both of us know what has happened because of that. Must I tell you that you would not be here unless you were willing to put trust in me? You know, *señor,* that if the desire moved me, I could have you killed—in complete privacy here and in great slowness. But those words make ugly sounds, and bad thoughts; I should not like to torture, and then murder, a man like you, even under these circumstances. But we are forced to talk honestly and simply to each other, if we wish at all to overcome those two traitors to our cause. Is that not so, *mi amigo?*"

BRIEFLY, Vigin inclined his head. "*Sí, señora, verdad . . .*" His voice was husky, rapid; there was a glint of sweat about his eye sockets. "But there was nothing else I could do. That gang of paid killers I had brought down from New York were yowling at my back, demanding I pay them, or at least pay their passage back North. I figured it the best of a bad bargain to give the guns to Romeran and Tiego and get them ashore secretly. Anyhow, we know—"

"Romeran and Tiego paid you how much for the guns?"

"Only ten thousand *pesos, señora.*"

"Give me that ten thousand *pesos, señor.*"

"*Señora,* I was afraid, and hid it as I came through the streets here."

"Give it to me!"

Clumsily, Vigin twitched the big, pale green notes out, gave them to her. "*Pues,*" she asked, "where did those two put the guns and ammunition?"

"In the customs house; Tiego is in charge there, and it is a strong place, well-guarded and not to be suspected by anybody."

"You speak truth now," she said. "But what were you going to do, after Romeran and Tiego fleeced you, you who usually fleece others so well?"

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"I was going to take that money you have just taken from me, and go back to New York. Away from here swiftly, anyhow."

"*Tonto—roncin!* Don't you know that Bichi Yacatel, or even I, would have you traced and killed, if you had done that? Ventura is the one place for you to be. The mail plane from the North just got in tonight, not more than two hours ago. You can say you came South in that; you can leave here now and get a *gasolena* and go right up the main line to Palos Altos. Before nine tomorrow morning, you can see Bichi Yacatel and tell him that, in New York, you discovered this second treachery against the government, but that you dared not trust news of it to the official wireless or cable codes, not knowing any longer who was dishonest in the country. And you should, with your tongue, be able to prove precisely to the President just how Romeran and Tiego have doubly betrayed him, and where that supply of arms is. That news about the guns will prove your case, and your fidelity to the government; not even Bichi Yacatel will distrust you after that. And that, and the satisfaction of seeing Romeran and Tiego led out before an execution squad, should be worth a whole lot more than ten times ten thousand *pesos*. I speak logic?"

Vigin wagged his head, and hands. "But, *Señora,* the revolution—"

"*ABAJO!*" She was sitting straight up in the chair. "What revolution, you fool? After this last one collapsed in a web of treachery and cheap graft that has choked us all? Wait! Wait till you hear from me, and for the moment of the real revolution. Meantime, stay close to my son, talk softly with him, and perhaps, *Dios sabe,* you will be the next collector of customs of Nuevitas, or the next *commandante* of the garrison, and you will be able to smile, when you see how well Romeran's or Tiego's boots fit on your feet. You may leave now. But, be sure that no one else sees you in the streets or in the town. *Con dios, Señor.*"

Vigin bent his sweaty face and kissed her hand with a smacking sound, straightened and said voluble thanks in flowery Castilian phrases, bowed again, then wheeled, almost running towards the door. But there he stopped, to call back:

DONA YACATEL

"*Señora,* truly I shall never know how to thank you for this."

She turned a little bit in the chair and looked after him. "In Palos Altos," she said, her voice a dim whisper, "perhaps you will learn." Then she sat back and was still, not even moving when the door shut behind him.

She sat in an immobility which resembled death when Crown came forth around the screen to her chair. But the lids of her eyes were lifted, and with her eyes she smiled at him. "*Ca marche,*" she said. "It goes along well.

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But I am tempted to wonder in just what grotesque style my son will kill that man. Because, next, those two sadly funny fellows, Romeran and Tiego, are coming here, and then you will be leaving."

"When?" Frank Crown asked hoarsely, the big Luger pistol still in his hand.

"Almost right away, *Capitaine.* Because I want you and your fellows, and those guns, started on your way up to Palos Altos before dawn. But the *commandante* and the collector of the port will not be here, I believe, for another half an hour yet. And, in the meantime, I have something else for you to do.

"I want you to meet the girl of that sad Irishman, and the girl who will get those big East Indians for us."

"The guys to carry the guns," Frank Crown said in English. "The lads who'll make up our army."

"That is if—" she said as she pushed lightly a bell button on the side of the chair.

But Crown swung his head and body then, and she swung in her chair, for the servant's gentle rapping had just come on the door and the door been opened. Into the room, a tall and slim woman whose hair was like burnished silver in a frame about her long, delicately featured face and wide, deep gray eyes, was entering before Mauran O'Doghue. The woman was dressed in a nankeen riding habit, small spurs caught musically over the carpet at her heels, and the boots, the cloth of the habit, were stained with hours of steady riding on a tropic trail. Frank Crown knew that certainly in his life he had never seen before anyone as oddly and quietly beautiful. She smiled at la Doña Yacatel as she advanced, looked with a slow, calm glance at Frank Crown, then back over her shoulder at Mauran O'Doghue.

O'DOGHUE walked as though his strides were informed by music none of the others in the room could hear. His head and his shoulders were back, his hands hanging with easy straightness at his sides; for the first time, Frank Crown was able to visualize the man as a soldier and the commanding officer of famous regiments. Then his glance caught Frank Crown's and one of his hands went lightly out to the shoulder of the woman who walked beside him. "My dear," he said, "I wish very much to present to you a man who has newly become my friend, and who has more than anybody else brought about our being here in this house tonight. Miss Jane Kancavan, I present to you Captain Frank Crown."

Her hand was long, and as sinewy and strong as a man's, Frank Crown found, and her glance as level and quick, her voice, soft and deep, rich with the Irish accent most of which O'Doghue had lost somewhere through the years. "Mauran has already told me of you," she said to Frank Crown. "May I only say now that I am very glad that you are here with him?"

"Thank you," Frank Crown said simply, but behind them in the chair there was a small, bird-like fluttering movement, and la Doña Yacatel was again shrilling at them. "*Mademoiselle,*" she said, "just how many men from your own and the Floritas plantation can you have up at Biajia on the main line by ten o'clock tomorrow morning?"

"Between three hundred and fifty and four hundred," Jane Kancavan said instantly, quietly. "The odd fifty would be young men, those who have

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never before seen military service or carried regular arms."

"Leave them home," la Doña Yacatel told her, "to guard the plantations and keep the women happy. This is going to be quick war, or a slaughter—a slaughter of ourselves. When will you be ready to leave for the *tierra alta?*"

Jane Kancavan smiled a little bit. "Right now," she said.

"Go, then," la Doña Yacatel snapped at her. "And take your man with you; he has led that kind of troops before, and he speaks their language. *Le Capitaine* and the others, with the guns, will meet you and them at Biajia at ten o'clock. Good night, good luck. I am glad you found your man, *chica;* we need soldiers."

The tall Irishman and the tall Irishwoman smiled at each other, and then at her, silently reached down and took her hand. Then they shook hands with Frank Crown, the woman saying softly, "We will see you tomorrow at Biajia at ten then, Captain. Goodnight." Mauran O'Doghue said no more than that himself, but he struck the big American an open-palmed and hard blow with his free hand, and, as he swung to go, looked back over his shoulder and asked: "The luck, soldier?"

"Yeah, that's it," Frank Crown said. "It looks like the luck now, all right."

A snorting, half audible sound came from the chair, and he found la Doña Yacatel glaring at him. "'Luck'!" she repeated in a thin whisper. "That is how men explain themselves when they are surrounded by intelligent women. Get behind that screen; my very dear friends and those two great fools, *Señor el Commandante* Romeran and *Señor,* the Collector of the Port, Tiego, are at the front gate now. Can't you hear them jerking at the bell, as though they owned this place, and all the world—instead of a very small corner of hell? But, if they make one false move here, the pleasure will be yours: kill them instantly."

CHAPTER IV.

"THIS IS THE LUCK."

THOSE two men, Romeran and Tiego, did not enter the room together. The man who Frank Crown immediately identified to himself as Tiego, the harbor master and collector of customs, came in first, a lank and weird figure in a preposterously cut and braided woolen uniform of hunter's green set off with silver buttons as big as dollar coins and a shiny patent leather kepi topped by a red and white pom-pom. He walked with his head and shoulders bowed forward, his hands loosely at his sides below a belt that was studded with catches and buckles, but bore no other sign of a weapon, his yellow-skinned and long-nosed face a drab, expressionless mask under the flare of his kepi visor, his small-set eyes in an oblique, blinking gaze upon la Doña Yacatel in her chair. Crown gave him but one brief glance; all his nerves and fighting instincts had been occultly informed by the presence of the second man.

Romeran gave almost the appearance of being truncated. He seemed to have been cut from some block of hard tropic wood, and then left unfinished by his designer. His shoulders and torso were tremendous; his vast neck rose right out of them, tapering into a cone-shaped head of which the only prominent feature was the eyes, liquidly black and wide, unusually pro-

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tuberant and staring with an unbreaking gaze, like those of a man held in some awful, hidden hypnotic spell. But from the waist down, the figure resembled an immature boy's.

The legs were very slight, and bowed; the feet were extremely small and flat-arched.

Crown drew and exhaled a breath very slowly. Those feet were bare, scarred and hard with callouses that must have been inches thick. Romeran lifted them delicately, slightly up and put them down as though walking through underbrush, through jungle. Here, thought Frank Crown in a rapid, sharp flash of intuition, was a real bush Indian, a truly savage and evilly dangerous man. Here was perhaps the most deadly man he had ever seen in his life.

Above those eyes a sweat-soiled gray Stetson hat sat cocked heavily, the brim pulled a little down by the taut chin strap. The clothing was simple, utterly crude: a baggy khaki jacket which was made a uniform tunic by two greenish, faded gold epaulettes, and a pair of loose jean trousers. Low against the small, flat hips was a brass-edged, double-tiered cartridge belt through which a machete with a double edge was thrust, and at each side of which hung heavily and closely two long- barheled Belgian automatics, held in holsters whose tops were cut away and whose bottoms were lashed against the thighs with braided leather cords. Other braided cords were made fast just below the knees, dragging the trouser hems up from the ankles. Romeran would ride in that costume, Crown thought, or sleep in it, fight and live in it unchanged for months. Now, he told himself, he could see one very valid reason why Bichi Yacatel had been willing to make a peace settlement of two million dollars cash, and Vigin for far less.

ROMERAN had let Tiego come in the door before him, walking a bit sidewise after him, so that his back was never turned until the Negro servant had shut the door, and then moving, with ease and swiftness, out of any possible direct line of fire from it. He now let Tiego talk first to la Doña Yacatel. Tiego was very nervous; he talked rapidly in a gabbling, unctuous voice in excellent Spanish, the pom-pommed kepi off and nearly sweeping the floor before the chair. But Romeran broke in upon him, with a voice that clashed like hammered metal: "Who have you got behind the screen there, old rabbit?"

La Doña Yacatel's sound of laughter came up. "Do you think an *Indito* would try to betray an *Indito,* my friend?"

Romeran did not answer; he did not seem to have heard. His eyes were on Tiego and Tiego was gaping at him slack-mouthed. Romeran lifted out a hand that jabbed Tiego in the shoulder, spun him nearly around. "Walk towards that screen," he said.

Tiego stared towards the screen. "There is no one there," he said in a voice that mumbled and choked. "La Doña Yacatel would not—"

Romeran stood facing la Doña Yacatel, looking at her, not at the screen, and into each of his hands he had brought a gun. "Walk!" he said, to Tiego.

Tiego lifted his shoulders; his eyelids and his hands fluttered. "I have not got a gun," he said. "Give me a gun."

Romeran stood unmoving, his gaze completely locked with the gaze of the woman in the chair. "Walk!" he said.

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"It is not that cheap imitation Vigin."

It was as if his guns had come around and met the small of Tiego's back. The lank and shambling man began to walk. As he walked, Romeran talked to him, never lifting his eyes from la Doña Yacatel's face. "The old rabbit has tricked us. And Vigin. Remember; I told you; we did not pay Vigin enough, and he has been here, and is gone by now. The *hombre* behind the screen is some foreigner; one of the *hacendados* from up above, or one of the men Vigin said he left on the ship. That's it; walk slowly. The *hombre* will not want to shoot you; he will want to shoot me, before I shoot the old rabbit. Jerk the screen down, take it with both hands."

Sweat was filming on Frank Crown's forehead, sliding towards his eyes. Even the steel of the pistol seemed slippery and treacherously insecure in his hand. But a kind of silent, ironic laughter held him, and one fact was vibrant before the highly sensitized retina of his brain: Romeran talked for him, and not for Tiego, and Tiego was armed—must be armed. Romeran must have been aware of his presence from the instant of his entrance into the room, was now using it to his own savage advantage, trapping him, Crown, into an indecision of action, attempting to force him to concentrate upon the chair and the danger to la Doña Yacatel, and not the man who in this second was beginning to lift his hands and arms up, as though to grasp suddenly at the screen.

BUT then Crown saw the lank man's arm twitch sharply at the shoulder—and the elbow, then begin to fall swiftly, and the dark glint of the little Derringer revolver muzzle as it slid out from the wide sleeve into the cupped, gathered hand. Frank Crown pivoted with all his strength and speed; he butted the heavy screen toppling and crashing with his shoulder, and in the same swing brought his strongly booted foot up and kicked Tiego squarely in the groin, slammed two snap shots shoulder high at Romeran beyond.

His advantage had been only a split second: that gained in the blurred sight of the little gun in Tiego's sleeve. Even then, he was late, for Romeran had whipped both his automatics upon him. And it was la Doña Yacatel who probably saved his life, brought up from under the looped silk fringes of her *manton* a knife which she flicked flat-sided in Romeran's face. By some animal-sense of foreknowledge, the Indian had perceived her motion, twitched his head aside, took the spinning, sharp blade on his cheek-bone and not full in his eyes. But as the echoes of his first two high shots at the American still clanged in the room with the echoes of Crown's shots, he wheeled back, firing for her.

But then the third of Crown's slugs got him, struck him in the fleshy part of the shoulder, knocked him headlong, and the guns from his hands in the galvanic shock. Crown was starting for him when Tiejo rose up from the floor. Some of the color from his uniform seemed to have seeped into Tiejo's face; it was a dull green shade, and he had bitten his lower lip until blood trickled from it in the agony of the groin blow Crown had given him. Tiejo lurched as he stood, but he held the little revolver levelly braced across the wrist of his free hand, his eyes gaping through the fog of pain holding him.

Crown's impression was that the moment was very long between them, that, almost, he and this man were fighting

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an odd kind of polite duel. He saw the other very distinctly, saw the neat, small, black rings of the Derringer muzzle, the other's dazed, contorted face, huge above the revolver. Then his own gun crashed, and the Derringer and the palely green-splotched face were jerked out of his sight and he heard the thumping of the other's body on the floor.

"What a Betsy," he muttered, referring to the Luger and unconsciously quoting one of Flopsy Tinna's trade phrases. "Baby, what a wallop!"

Then, at the door, he saw and heard Flopsy Tinna. The door was open; Flopsy Tinna was hurtling through it, butting aside the black servant and ripping the automatic from that man's hands. "Behind youse!" Tinna howled at him. "Behind youse, sap!"

Romeran was behind him. He was crawling along the floor, pushing himself with his wounded arm, his good one stretching out for the nearest of his lost automatics. Crown sprang for him, yelling at Tinna not to shoot. He brought the toe of his boot close in against Romeran's stretching fingers. He stared down into Romeran's staring and pain-veiled eyes. "I won't shoot," he said to him; "and those men in the doorway won't shoot. We want you alive; get that? Go for the gun, and I smash your hand."

WHAT might have been a smile came up around and passed from Romeran's eyes. Slowly, steadily, he stretched out his hand for the gun. But Crown was back from him, shuttling the gun away with a quick sidewise kick, the other's fingers just missing the ankle grip which would have flung the American head foremost and down, between him and Tinna at the door.

Crown smiled at him as he cursed him. "You're too good to be drilled through the head," Crown told him. "We want more out of you than a little target practice. Think of the rug—and get to hell up before I lame the other arm for keeps!"

Tinna was close beside them now, and Domeros and Samuel and the servants were in the room; Crown reached abruptly down, caught him by the jacket and yanked him to his feet, spun him sharply around for Tinna to whip the evilly edged machete out from the belt. Tinna tried the blade with the side of his thumb, then slipped his borrowed automatic into his left hand. "Brother," he said, "I ain't th' butcher er th' butcher's son, but don't make one more phony pass er I'll knock youse fer a triple with this. That there coconut noggin tempts me." But then, somberly, his glance crossed to Frank Crown:

"What's the pay-off, fella?"

"He's the pay-off," Frank Crown said softly, his body still trembling as he remembered how close Romeran's fingers had come to his backward-moving ankle. "And yeah; I drilled his pal.

"This one is the fellow they call the *comandante,* though; the C.O. for the troops in town. He knows Vigin hung a double-cross on him and the skinny guy, and he knows where and how we can get those guns they brought ashore. But, keep an eye on him while I—"

"If you mean the old doll over there in th' chair," Tinna cut in upon him, jerking his head towards where Domeros, Samuel and the servants had gone to stand, "I guess she ain't playin' at this table any more. Huh, Sammy?"

The little black trooper straightened up and stared at them, his face rigid,

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his eyes unclear. "*Señora's* dead; yes, sir," he said. "Looks like mebbe she wanted to do too much, an' tried to get up from the chair afte' one o' them guns."

FRANK CROWN moved slowly, and the others were away from the chair when he reached it. La Doña Yacatel sat upright and stiffly in it, poised on its very edge. The claw-like hands were clenched out upon the wide rattan arms, and behind her, inches from her head, were two gaping holes where Romeran's last bullets had passed. Her eyes were open in death, and her face no less without expression. Samuel's description had been an accurate one; even now, she seemed upon the point of rapid and certain movement, and it was Captain Crown's belief that the look contained in the dark, deep eyes was only one of surprise, surprise at death, which had come so quietly, after all.

Frank Crown turned very gradually from her, and the tips of the fingers of his right hand had reached up in salute before he did so. He looked at Samuel, jerking his head towards the staring servants. "Tell them," he told the trooper, "to go and get the women in the house and have her taken from here. And, if she used a priest, to go and get the priest. Tell them to snap it up; we're leaving here in a hurry." Then, in quick strides, he came back to where Tinna and Domeros stood, flanking Romeran.

"You know," he said to Romeran; "you understand enough now. We want those guns you and Tiejo put in the customs house. And you're going to get them for us. Understand me?"

Romeran laughed. "Who is paying you?" he asked in slow, clear English. "Or did the old woman end up with more admirers than she knew what to do with?"

"Listen," Flopsy Tinna softly said; "listen t' me, yuh dumb donkey. This big fella here is leadin' us; he runs th' gas works. But, it ain't against any o' his or my principles if I was to up an' shoot each o' them dirty toes o' yours off, one by one. An' then maybe break yer fingers, just like candy sticks. So, no more stupid answers, hah?"

Romeran slightly lifted a massive shoulder. "So you," he said to Frank Crown, "are the *capataz* here. And you want the guns, and me to get them for you."

"Right now," Frank Crown said.

"Vigin is up in Palos Altos by now," Romeran said. "The old lady must have sent him there. And he will have talked with Yacatel. And Yacatel is no coward, or weakling; no son of that old woman could be. But, the old woman is dead, and Tiejo is dead, and you've got me, and there will be no one who counts to call Vigin a liar. *Sí, senores,* I'll get you the guns—if you'll let me go with you and get Vigin."

"Say that last again," said Frank Crown slowly. "You want to go with us when we go to Palos Altos?"

ROMERAN'S thin, long lips lifted in a smile as he took his glance for an instant to Domeros and Samuel. "This man must have never soldiered in these countries before," he told them. Then, to Crown, "*Hombre,* I can guess just how Vigin got you here, and about the East Indians from the Kancavan and Floritas plantations. And I can guess that they will fight pretty well for you, although I think that you can't win. But, you can guess what Vigin is able now to tell Bichi Yacatel about me—and what Yacatel will think, when four hundred

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troops armed and led by men who landed and organized in a district under my command come up calling on him?"

"Hooey!" Flopsy Tinna boomed out at Frank Crown. "All these guys do nothin' down here but fling th' baloney!"

Frank Crown stared past them for a moment; weeping women and a small, brown-faced priest who dimly intoned a prayer had just come into the room and then left it, bearing la Doña Yacatel. "No," he said then to Tinna, "maybe it isn't all baloney. We've got to have the guns, anyhow, and we can't get them without this guy. We can always plug him, if he tries to go bad, and he doesn't look to me like a guy who would die gladly for Bichi Yacatel. So you'll get the guns for us, hey, Romeran; and you want to get Vigin, too?"

Romeran gave him the thin-lipped smile. "Your friend," he said, "seems to think that all men who speak Spanish speak lies. But, you have told me you are in a hurry, and he has said he wants proof. Here is just this much—Palos Altos is a walled town, and only stupid men would try to take it without artillery. But, over here in the arsenal now is a .75 millimeter railroad gun which was brought down last month, and which, under the circumstances, I saw remained here. It has its own car, engine and tender, and more than six hundred rounds of shells. With that, Palos Altos might be taken. And, as you have suggested, if you find I am lying to you, you can shoot me in any number of ways."

For one moment more, Frank Crown stared fixedly into those protuberant and unreadable eyes, then said a curse word sharply. "Let's go!" he barked at them. "This guy is your meat, Flopsy; you fumble him, the whole show goes to hell. But, stick a dressing on the guy's arm while I take Sammy and get all the guns in the house and a couple of cloaks we can wear . . . This is the luck, lousy or good!"

CHAPTER V.

TIN APPLES.

IT was after two in the morning when they left the house of Doña Yacatel. It was after four and the dawn was high when they left Nuevitas. Samuel, who admitted he had done the job at least once or twice before, was at the throttle of the locomotive which hauled them and a tender loaded with green palmetto chunks, the car which carried the canvas-hooded .75 gun with over six hundred rounds for it, and a flat car where, underneath a layer of tarpaulins, most of Vigin's former supply of arms and ammunition lay quite compactly.

In that time between, Frank Crown and the rest of them had done a number of things. They had left the house of la Doña Yacatel wearing the long, loose capes of the country, walking deserted and dark alleys and side streets. Domeros and the Negro trooper carried two pistols and a machete apiece; Crown, from years of old Legion habit, had not been happy to leave until he had found a Mauser rifle to supplement Romeran's and his own automatics. Flopsy Tinna, seemed monumental in a striped woolen cape, carried an automatic in each hand, and walked pace for pace with Romeran, one of the automatics, despite the cloak, jammed in constant suggestion up against the Indian's ribs until they reached the center of the town and a wide plaza.

Skinny dogs yowled there under the

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dip of shadow from the cathedral tower, keeping the bare-footed sentry opposite at the door of the *cuartel* from full sleep. He started up and stared at them, shouldering his old-style carbine first, then bringing it down to his waist as he made out Romeran's face. "I cut it thick, fella," Tinna whispered, then in warning to Romeran, "an' this here cloak drags down on a hammer. Speak yer piece!"

Romeran spoke at once, in a low and snarling voice. He cursed the sentry and told him to come to the position of port arms. The sentry gawped at all the strange and intent faces, then slowly began to shuffle his feet together and the carbine up in his hands. He was standing quite erect when Domeros, stepping lightly sidewise, took his glance, and Frank Crown, stepping in, caught him fairly across the back of the skull with the rifle barrel. The man fell without a sound, the carbine still clenched in his hands. Samuel had him by the feet, was dragging him into the shadows and taking the bolt from the old Gras carbine as Crown, then Tinna, behind Romeran and Domeros, entered the shabby doorway of the *cuartel.*

Four other soldiers of the guard slept in the guard-room in spite of the flies and two big, sputtering kerosene lanterns. In the next room, Frank Crown found as he entered, the young sergeant on duty was reading a paper-backed Spanish novel as he leaned up against the keys of the telegraph. The sergeant dropped the novel and reached for a holstered pistol with one hand and a telegraph key with the other. Crown showed him the Mauser, and then, reaching out, swept the other weapon, still half in its holster, out onto the floor.

Domeros was there with him then, went forward and took the man's leather duty-belt from about his waist, strapped his hands behind his back with it, ripped a few pages from the back of the novel, and with the sergeant's own handkerchief devised a gag.

"How about the telegraph, Romeran?" Crown asked, searching the sergeant and taking out a ring of keys from an upper tunic pocket.

"It's the only one up to Palos Altos," Romeran said mildly, smiling at the sergeant's frantic stare. "I guess you are lucky . . ." Then, hearing Flopsy Tinna's snort, he inclined his head towards Samuel in the doorway. "Ask the black man," he said. "He knows the country."

"'At's right," Samuel said briefly. "Fella ain't lyin' now. You want me ta pull th' guts outa it, *teniente?*"

"All you can reach," Crown told him. "Where's the arsenal now, Romeran, and the .75 gun? Then how do we get to the customs house and the other stuff?"

ROMERAN cocked his head sidewise. "Out through the rear door of the *cuartel* here, and you're in the arsenal yard. The gun train is there, and the customs house is connected to the arsenal."

"Ain't but a short spit, *teniente,*" Samuel offered, happily ripping up and smashing the telegraph key boards and connection wires. "Pair o' tracks runs right from this he' arsenal yard right the'. All a fella's gotta do is get them guns, fin' himself one o' these he' little two-spot Spiggoty flat cars, an' we can haul it by hand. Unless yuh want me t' find if I c'n get steam up on that engine; I kinda got a hand fer them things an' elevators."

Crown swung his head; Domeros

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stood in the room beyond, and had just made a low, warning whistling sound. A carriage with badly rimmed iron tires was banging over the cobbles outside in the plaza, and they there could hear two voices, one high and thick, cursing the carriage driver, the other as the driver took his fare and drove cursing away. Then there was a sound of spurred boots coming up the entrance steps.

Frank Crown and Domeros were both there by the door when the officer started in. He was a young man, a Captain, and a little drunk. But he already had his mouth open to yell for the sergeant of the guard before he saw the pistols in Domeros' hands, and tried to jump quickly back as Frank Crown hit him with a short, crossing left and knocked him out to the floor. The man fell heavily, and moaning, and three of the sleepy guard on the benches sat up, to stare into Crown's and Domeros' pistols, then silently jab their hands high at Domeros' hissed command in Spanish.

Crown swore savagely as Domeros and Samuel helped him bind up and gag them and the young captain. "Come on!" he said. "Dump them in there with the sergeant and shut and lock the door. This is getting too much like a bowling alley. We'll have to play it on the run with the rest of them. Come on, Flopsy; shove your pal along!"

The rear door of the *cuartel* gave out onto an immense and dusty space fronted on all sides by narrow, scabbily white-washed b u i l d i n g s. "Boy!" husked Flopsy Tinna as they came forth into it, "what a fine spot t' pay-off all hands, huh?" Then he was silent, staring with all of them, and Frank Crown was running forward to where, upon the rusty pair of rails that ran down the middle of the parade ground, the long, lean .75 millimeter rifle and its squat little engine and tender rested deeply in the shadows.

"The's a gate at the othe' end," Samuel whispered up at him as Crown climbed from the gun bed up onto the firing platform. "I get enough steam on this baby, I'll just rightly smash that down."

"SHOVE it in!" Crown snapped at him, kneeling to crawl over snub-nosed stacks of shells in the body of the car, then drop from the rear end to the ground. "Find a piece of chain first, though; we'll have to leave this guy, Romeran, here with you. I'll need Tinna with Domeros and me, to get that stuff out of the customs house."

"You push right along then, *teniente*," Samuel told him. "I'll back right down to th' door fer you all when you're set."

Crown hardly heard him, only nodded, turning to run back towards the others, jam Romeran forward between Tinna and Domeros towards the little locomotive, where, already, Samuel had fished forth a piece of stout chain. "If they catch us here now, they will kill us all," Romeran told Crown sourly as the big man lashed him to the steel support of the engineer's seat in the cab.

"Pipe down, then!" Crown flung back, leaping to the ground, the big bunch of the sergeant's keys in his hand, "or Samuel here will begin the show with you right now!"

The customs house door squealed loudly as they dragged it open, and the rickety hand truck they had found clattered as they shoved it along before them. But, inside, the place was like an immense and forgotten cavern where they wandered ghost-like, the

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matches they held only burning fragmentary gaps in the gloom. "Mebbe Firpo fought here, huh?" Flopsy Tinna muttered, staggering over the rear wheels of the truck as Crown guided it past a heap of indigo sacks.

"There'll be a better scrap than that, right away," Frank Crown barked. "Hear that bugle?"

"It ain't th' Boy Scouts again," Tinna muttered back, then swung, pointing. "Look over there, though, in th' corner, where all that junk is piled up around'. Ain't that what th' girls want?"

They left the hand truck and ran, scrambled up through the sacks of coffee and bales of hides, boxes that they only knew held what they did not want and ripped their hands and shins. But, behind, barriered there, was what they sought. "Go on!" Frank Crown rapped at them, tearing down through the neatly grouped cases. "Get the truck over here! I'm going to break out an auto-gun and a few grenades—then I'll go over and win the war for Nuevitas. Run, you pair of goats!"

Every window in the upper floors of the long barracks on both sides of the parade ground was alight and black figures jammed the frames as Crown came out, the dragging cloak off his shoulders and awkward with its load of grenades and ammunition, a Thompson gun in his other hand. Even in that mass of shadow, he must have stood out, for shouts, and then a banging clatter of shots, came from the windows at once, and most of the lights went out there, only the beam from a powerful electric torch cutting over the engine and him. He could hear the Mauser and Gras carbine lead churning up off the engine cab and boiler sides, cursed as he thought of little Samuel there, kneeling to stoke his fire-box that was already whipping out big sparks from the stack. From left to right, quite high, he let a clip go from the Thompson gun, raking along the barracks on each side.

THE smashed chatter of shots stopped; the sounds were wild yells and the clattering of wooden bunks as they were swung up against the windows. "So you know better," Crown whispered, dropping the Thompson gun down into the blanket and whipping up a brace of grenades. With those in one hand, hefting the sack behind him, he ran towards the train.

He was nearly there when the firing started again, this time in concerted, shrewdly directed volleys. Bullets whanged from the steel and wood of the cars as he hoisted himself up, climbed along past the .75 gun, over the pile of palmetto chunks in the tender and down to the cab. "Sammy!" he shouted, nursing his blanket load down, "hey, Sammy!"

Then he saw the black man. He lay sprawled on the cab decking, one hand up and out, still grasping an automatic. The fire-box door was open; flame from the dry palmetto chunks, whickering out in gusts, had singed the thick, gray wool, was already drying the clotted blood along the base of the skull. Crown slowly lifted his eyes; the chain which had held Romeran lashed to the engineer's seat still hung there, two of the links snapped, widely bent.

Frank Crown knelt down. He lifted Samuel's head up into his arms, butting shut with his shoulder the fire-box door, blanking off the flare of light that had made an excellent target for the barracks windows marksmen. He ripped his fingers through the thin cot-

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ton shirt, then laughed aloud. his hand going to that long, jagged cut along the skull. "Come on, Sammy," he muttered aloud; "do we go?"

Samuel moved in his arms, struggled around and sat up. "Boy," he husked, "oh, boy! That fella he hit me a crack that bid fair to knock my ears down... No, not with no gun. Busy as I was, I keep him back from that. But I'm a soft-hea'ted black boy, I am; I lash him with his good hand, an' don't think anythin' about his wounded wing. An' he clap me down with that; how he do! An' then he break that chain—just, poof—an' when I fish myself up offa th' deck, he bend my gun on my haid..."

Frank Crown was arranging the blanket and getting out hand grenades. "You all right?"

"I ain't all right, but I ain't bad. How them othe' fellas comin'?"

"I guess Romeran will be out of the barracks in a minute himself, to ask that. After he's fixed up that telegraph again, and got them going on ripping up the rails outside the gate, or anywhere between Biajia, here and Palos Altos... But, you shove the steam on; I'll be back..."

HE slid down out of the cab then. He moved seven or eight strides from it, and put down all but one of his pile of grenades on the ground. He pulled the pin from that one, waited judiciously and heaved it. "Now send your telegrams!" he yelled, ducking down as it broke. "Guy, you won't even find the ground floor or the wires!" He crouched up, and heaved another, a little further along, just to make sure, then turned, hearing the high wave of rifle fire from the other side, and swerved two more up over the train.

A kind of silence came then. He could hear Samuel, muttering and struggling at his pressure gauges and his fire, and the cries of wounded and dying men, the rending, crashing collapse of floors and walls in the barracks on both sides. Then he turned and ran for the cab, picked up the Thompson gun and a fresh clip for it, ran along the tracks towards the gate out into the town Samuel had pointed to when they had come here.

He ripped the lock out of that with a prolonged burst from the gun, gnawed the wood right away from the stout old iron, then jammed the halves of the gate back, came slowly into the street. Troops were running there in a loose kind of column, a platoon or so which turned the corner from the plaza and the *cuartel*. He let a grenade bounce and break in front of them, cracked a lash of lead through them before the last turned and ran. "No smashed rails," he mumbled, heading back through the gate. "And no butchery of the Irish and the East Indians up at Biajia this morning..."

He was only a few yards from the gate back into the enclosed space of the parade ground when Samuel met him. The little man staggered as he ran, but he carried a grenade in each hand and he grinned when he spoke. "Ain't got enough on her yet t' make a mule sneeze, but it'll turn 'em over an' haul us outa he', anyhow. Time t' worry is on them grades up in the mountains. You let them rip up them switch-points out of here any? Well, *teniente*, you stay an' you don't let them do that, I'll back my buggy up an' bring along them othe' two gents. Sounds, from th' shootin', they got all that stuff right at th' door o' that place. Lot o' fellas wanderin' around in between, though. That Romeran, he's a real bad boy."

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"Bad enough," Frank Crown admitted quietly. "But with fair enough ideas! if he caught us here, it sure would be a honey. Now get that buggy rolling!"

EVEN as he spoke, he turned, hearing the yelled orders behind them and seeing a wave of men with bayoneted rifles break from the wreck of the nearest barracks towards the train. He went to one knee, let a swinging burst go in the same instant Samuel lobbed a grenade up towards the stragglers further back. Then, clamping the hot gun between his knees, he dragged the two pistols out from his belt, shoved them into Samuel's hands. "Swap you your other grenades!" he yelled. "There's more in the cab! And those guys are heading after Tinna and Domeros now!"

Samuel nodded grinning at him, swung lurching and was gone. For a minute or two then Crown watched him, but he was out of his sight into the flame-slashed darkness of the place, and in the street beyond there was another gathered pounding of feet; quickly he advanced once more with the rough steel of grenades clenched loosely in his hands.

He had thrown all his grenades, fired the last short burst from the Thompson gun and was hacking at a knot of men with bayoneted rifles who screamed as they jabbed at him, when the train came bunting slowly along the tracks. Somehow, Samuel had got the acetylene headlight going: it sent a lemon-yellow strand of light out along ahead of it, and, seated beneath the light, his fat knees propped up on the short cow-catcher, Flopsy Tinna hunched and spread death and terror with an auto-rifle.

The men who faced Frank Crown could not confront that; they gave, ducked and fell rapidly back. Tinna hooted, and stood upon the small steel triangle of the cow-catcher. "Get up, baby! That's it! Boy, won't they sell postcards o' this town now. But, hang on tight an' keep yer teeth; just before I come along up here, Domeros was rippin' th' shirt off that big piece, an' shovin' a lot o' hell in it. He says these baloneys run better 'n they fight, an' Romeran's smart enough t' have started some o' them way out beyond now, t' rip up track there. But our grease-ball pal is right on his stuff, an' he says it's gettin' light enough so's he can see t' aim an' shoot. An' this here town has got flat streets. He says he can see up th' town fer a coupla miles now; right out t' where the jungle begins, an' the mountains. Sammy says there ain't no folks get knocked off by th' trains. So I guess th' Serbian wonder'll make them streets a lot flatter 'n they are now. Grab a holt; there she comes!"

HANGING there, their bodies and legs jamming the guns and ammunition cases into place, they were all but shaken into unconsciousness by the first throbbing slam of the big .75 gun. Far ahead, out where the first clear morning sunlight rested whitely on the lush green of growing cane along a wide and dusty road that paralleled the tracks, the shell hit, struck up dust and a wavering ivory pillar of smoke flecked with vermilion flame. "Shrapnel," Frank Crown whispered.

"'Shrapnel,' hah?" Tinna said. "Well, they sure run, anyhow! Look at 'em beat it outa there!"

In the immediate distance, Frank Crown could see them: little men in

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loose khaki uniforms who raced wildly from where they had started to hide in the cane, fled now in stupid rout. "That would have stopped the buggy," Frank Crown said slowly. "But Sammy's getting a little speed on this one now. We're going as fast as those guys can run—and so we can knock them off from here with a Tommy gun."

Flopsy Tinna was staring ahead, blinking his red-rimmed, weary eyes in the fresh sunlight. "Where's the next fightin' we do, fella?"

"Up there." Crown nodded. "On the mountain."

Flopsy Tinna scratched the back of his head with a gun-blistered hand. "I ain't never scrapped with no guys on a mountain," he said soberly.

Frank Crown did not grin at him. "Don't worry, guy," he said; "you'll fight plenty."

CHAPTER VI.

"WAR IS ONLY FOR MEN."

BIAJIA was a town that had possessed some small importance; it lay just above the crest of the mountain range that separated the *tierra caliente* from the *tierra alta*, in the past had been used as a rail shipping point for the coffee and citrus fruit growers of the region. When Frank Crown and the others reached it behind the snorting, sorely overheated engine at a quarter past ten that morning, it was a smoking, smashed wreck. All the few stout buildings in the town, the local barracks and town-hall, the school and the church, had been freshly crashed in with charges of high explosive. Vast green-gray plumes of smoke, from the smouldering palm thatch *bohio* huts still swayed against the sky.

But in what was left of the market place, the tall and quiet woman, Jane Kancavan, stood, and grouped in back of her, resting at ease in compact military ranks, were at least several hundred tall and quiet men, the East Indians. Those men were dressed in their native turbans and wide, white, loose trousers, carried no weapons but a few machetes, a small-calibre hunting rifle or shotgun. But, out beyond them, formed in patrols and guarding all the trails leading into the place and the tracks leading out from it to Palos Altos, were perhaps fifty men just like them, mounted on small native ponies and carrying comfortably in their hands lances which had been contrived soundly enough out of green, strong bamboo poles at whose ends machetes had been lashed with wire.

Frank Crown took that in with one swift, eager glance as he sprang down from the engine cab to the siding platform where Jane Kancavan had advanced. "Hullo," she said, lifting a hand in an easy salute. "I see you got what you went after, all right."

"Most of it," Frank Crown said. "But where's Mauran O'Doghue and the other men?"

She turned her long face in profile and indicated the tracks sloping out along the range of climbing hills to Palos Altos. "Romeran came in here about half an hour ago," she said. "He and about fifty soldiers in a couple of automobiles. I have no idea what happened down below after we left, but he must have come up here like hell; they were blowing up the buildings with dynamite and wrecking that piece of track there when we came in, out of the bush. But they weren't entirely successful at that; some of the citizens, who knew Romeran from other wars, objected to having their

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town blown to bits. And a few of the poor chaps tried to stop him . . ."

Frank Crown had been staring beyond, his eyes narrowed and a nerve puckering in his cheek, at where, against one remaining wall of the church, a score of men in cheap jean clothing lay heaped in a contorted pile of death. "I guess," Jane Kancavan said in her soft voice, "that they were afraid Romeran might steal their wives and young girls and all their food again, and that Romeran in his turn was afraid that we might use this town as a base, to fall back on if things didn't go well up at Palos Altos for us. Anyhow, Romeran retreated right out of town, up the tracks towards Palos Altos, as soon as Mauran came in out of the bush after him. And Mauran's chasing him on up the tracks now, keeping him from tearing them up. He told me to tell you to come right along and pick him up, with the train. You see, Romeran was in quite a hurry, and there was a pile of spare rails over there. I've had these fellows of ours fix the track again while we've been waiting for you . . ."

FRANK CROWN smiled quickly at her. "Thanks," he said; "thanks a lot . . . We'll be out of here and after him and Romeran as soon as we can load the men and our combination engineer-fireman can find enough water and wood for what he calls his buggy, here. Who's in charge of these boys, after you?"

Jane Kancavan turned her head and called softly, "Singh Ghan!"

Singh Ghan was what Frank Crown knew to be a Sikh. He was a very thin and tall man, several inches taller than Crown's six feet-one. He stepped out from the right guide position of the front rank immediately, his machete in his hand, came sharply to a halt an exact three paces away, brought the weapon up in a sword salute. "*Memsahib!*" he said.

"This is Captain Crown," Jane Kancavan told him. "A friend of the Colonel *Sahib*. From now on you and all of you are to take orders from him until he or the Colonel *Sahib* tells you differently."

For only an instant, but fully, searchingly, Singh Ghan's sloe-black, narrow eyes moved in the scarred, gaunt, deep brown face and passed across Frank Crown's eyes and face. Then the machete flicked up again in salute. "Yes, *memsahib*."

Jane Kancavan smiled at Frank Crown. "Singh Ghan," she said, "was a *sirdar*, sergeant-major, in the Indian Army. You will find him a very good man, I think."

"Thanks," Frank Crown said, his eyes on the big Sikh. "Fall them out, sergeant-major," he said in a rapping voice. "See that they get all the water and fuel necessary for the locomotive. Then march them by squads to the rear car and I'll ration out guns and ammunition to them. You will call in the patrols out here in ten minutes; we are leaving here in twelve minutes."

"Very good, sir." The machete flashed, bare heels and toes turned exactly in the dust and the man was gone, his voice booming like an immense whip at the white-clad, swiftly straightening ranks and files.

"Romeran was wrong twice," Crown said in a flat voice to Jane Kancavan. "He thought he'd trap us in Nuevitas and that we'd never get beyond here, if we got this far at all; and he figured badly when he thought we'd ever need this place as a base or anywhere to fall back on. From here, we go to just one place—Palos Altos.

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How many miles is that exactly from here?"

"Forty-eight; you should be there late this afternoon."

"We'll be there this afternoon . . . Are you coming up with us?"

SHE smiled at him once more. "I promised Mauran that I wouldn't. He still adheres to the perhaps rather antique idea that war is only for men; I'm going back to the plantation, with the other women, when you leave. But, after this is over, I propose to introduce him to a little real peace . . ."

"La Doña Yacatel," Frank Crown said very slowly, "died a few minutes before we left her house in Nuevitas. Her heart just stopped . . . I'd just shot Tiejo and wounded Romeran, who'd figured out they were the tricksters being tricked. I don't know much about wars down in this country, but they don't seem to begin prettily."

"Make this one end prettily, then," she told him gravely. "And now, if you'll take me over to the other gentlemen, I think I can fix it so that you get a little food and wine before you leave."

"Right now," Frank Crown admitted, moving along beside her towards the locomotive where Tinna and Domeros and Samuel squatted while a file of water-and-wood laden men under Singh Ghan trotted past, "this war seems to be getting better all the time . . ."

They left her there, on that shattered platform, precisely ten minutes later, Sammy Samuel with a wine bottle in one hand, the throttle in the other. On top of the tender, down in the protective hollow they had contrived for themselves in the pile of fresh palmetto chunks, Frank Crown, Domeros and Tinna called quite gayly to her. But behind, where they crouched already against the sand-bag bulwarks they had placed about the .75 gun and in the flat car where space had been made for the few little ponies, the East Indian men did no more than look briefly and gravely at her, and the straight, fierce old man, Singh Ghan, was the only one to speak and salute her in parting. And then his glance also came rapidly around, back to the narrow winding of the tracks and the blue, high dimness of the further mountains where Mauran O'Doghue and the others had gone, fighting.

These were true and savagely experienced fighting men, reflected Frank Crown, scrambling back along the gun car to give a couple of last orders to Singh Ghan; most of them had seen a lot of war and killing before, and all of them had spent years in this country, had more than the knowledge of that pile of innocent dead peasants back by the church wall to tell them of what happened to anyone who dared to face Bichi Yacatel and his versatile understudy and secret ally, Romeran. He looked up once, just before he lowered himself down into the flat car. Flopsy Tinna was standing up wide-legged on the palmetto heap, waving an arm in a broad gesture as he yelled hoarsely back: "That there th' mountain up ahead where we do our act?"

"That's it!" Frank Crown barked in answer. "And sit down and keep your pants on, you bohunk!"

THEY met Mauran O'Doghue and his combat force of East Indians a little after noon; came first upon a few sprawled, dead bodies in the khaki uniforms of Bichi Yacatel's men, among them one or two white-turbaned East Indians, then upon the men of the rear guard. Those carried several

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wounded among them, their own men, and bore Gras and Mauser carbines taken from Romeran's dead. At Crown's order, Samuel slowed the train for them and they swung up aboard, lifting the wounded on crossed guns. But, up ahead, even before Singh Ghan or Tinna could shout out, Crown saw O'Doghue and the rest.

They were deployed in and around a narrow culvert which spanned a dry *arroyo,* were crouched comfortably back on their heels in all the shade they could find. "Could hear the ruddy engine panting for three miles away," the Irishman told Crown as he hefted himself up into the cab. "Romeran and his lads must have heard it, too, because a runner just came in from my point and told me that he's cleared up off the tracks and is heading for the Camino Norte. Which can only mean one thing: he certainly knows which side he's fighting on now, and that's Yacatel's."

"He's always been doin' nothin' but that," Flopsy Tinna broke sourly in. "Him an' Yacatel must ha' been ribbin' Vigin fer a sap right along, an' the old doll, an' then us."

"Yes, with furbelows," Mauran O'Doghue quietly said, standing back so one of Samuel's impromptu East Indian firemen could swing down a wood chunk behind him.

"I don't know what th' hell them things are," Flopsy Tinna said, yanking at his cap brim and staring out at the mountain, much nearer and clearer and bigger now. "But, fer plenty cash dough, anyhow . . . How far to the real fightin' now, d'you think, Irish?"

"Not long," O'Doghue told him, slowly smiling. "The telegraph wires are up along here, but Romeran had no way of cutting into them, and no instrument to talk with if he did. But he must have talked to Palos Altos from Biajia this morning, before we got in there after him, if since then he's had no way of telling them in Palos Altos that we got by Biajia with the train."

"Any telephones, Sammy," Crown interrupted slowly, "up around in this country which connect to Palos Altos?"

Samuel turned somber-eyed from squinting at his steam and pressure gauges. "Sure! more 'n a couple. Some o' them big *fincas* along th' Camino Norte got their own private wires inta th' town."

"So I guess," Frank Crown said softly to all of them there, "Romeran still must figure he and Yacatel have got the odds stacked big against us. They can have their whole rat trap army out and waiting for us before we're anywhere near there."

Samuel shook his gray-polled, bandaged head. "Not too much, boss. You look r i g h t up there, through them ceiba trees; that town ain't more than a dozen miles from he' right now. We'll be up on it, close enough fer t' use that .75 gun, anyhow, in anothe' half hour. An' they ain't got much big stuff in th' town—only one othe' .75 piece, an' that's on a fixed mount, up in that fort on top they call *El Justo.* Rest o' their stuff is old Maxim guns, an' some old, water-cool Colts."

DOMEROS had gone to crouch a little away from them, bend down towards the decking of the cab and take out from inside his ripped, sweated shirt a stained and much-folded map. "One of Vigin's maps," he grinned up at them. "A souvenir of the voyage. But it's got this year's date on it, and all the terrain elevations. If you—"

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"We'll do that," Frank Crown said. "I'm glad you got it, but I studied that map for almost three days straight back on the ship; it's all in my head, right now. How soon do we come out on that plain in front of the town, Sammy?"

"Right now," Samuel said, nudging at the throttle. "Right when we come out through this cut, up ahead. Then the town ain't but about four miles away."

"All right!" Crown was standing up in the cab, the muscles of his hands and wrists flexed, his hands down loosely over the butts of the two pistols shoved through his belt. "Let's get going! O'Doghue, you take all the mounted men; they're yours—you know them and know the language. I take the balance, the infantry, except for what men I'm going to leave here as a gun crew for Domeros and a force to hold the train.

"Tinna and Singh Ghan will take on half of my outfit; I'll take the rest and those ten guys who said they knew a grenade when they saw one down at Biajia. I've talked to Singh Ghan; he says he knows men who can handle the auto-rifles, and he's issued them out to them.

"Sammy will ride this one as long as it will go, and then join up with me. I'll hold right center, and Flopsy and Singh Ghan left center. You can handle your cavalry any way you want, Irish, as long as you cover our flanks. Because I don't think we'll get anywhere close to the town; I think Romeran has been on a phone already, or has hopped an auto in.

"They'll probably smack down on us as soon as we come into the open from the cab here. They've got maps, too, and they know just where this track runs."

He turned away for an instant, pushed up through the fuel heap to the tender top, stood crouched and staring off towards the drably colored and heaped old town which was already half visible to him on the steeply sloping mountainside above the plain beyond. He could see the fort there, a compact and squat structure past the red-tiled roofs of the houses of the town, and the small blur of color which was the national flag upon the staff there. Then, like distant lightning, he saw the flash and they all heard the whimpered, coughing flight and slammed arrival of the shell out beyond the final thick clumping of trees about the shallow cut they rode through. He swung back into the cab. "Get going!" he rapped at them. "They're putting a bracket on the tracks now; they'll have them all pounded to hell before we show out front. Slow her down, Sammy; an' some old, water-cool' Colts."

CHAPTER VII.

ROUT AND RETREAT.

THE plain beyond was quite flat, only gently sloping on its far, western side up into the first clutter of houses before the walls of the town. The old Spanish had built Palos Altos, and they had designed it in the fashion of their feudal towns in Aragon and Castile. A high, strong wall ran all around it, and the houses within were narrowly jammed and heavily built, crowded up against the ancient and thick walls of the fort, *El Justo*, that dominated all of it and all the plain below.

But Bichi Yacatel and Romeran, the only man who really served him well that afternoon, elected to fight from tions. If you—"

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the plain. The plain was grown in manioc and rough Indian corn, a few wild cotton and thorn trees rising up widely separated. Irrigation ditches cut across it, and the narrow-gauge railway line, the shallow, dusty trace of the Camino Norte; that was all. The rest was manioc, and waving, shoulder-high green corn.

Romeran had already brought the troops Yacatel gave him right out into the plain. Just before he left the little train and swung to the head of the column O'Doghue, Tinna and Singh Ghan had formed for him, Frank Crown saw those men coming down out of the main gate of the town. Cavalry, men who wore bright blue tunics and kepis, bore lances with fanions and pennants fluttering from their tips, came first. The infantry, a dull, much slower, column in khaki, came after. Then the vast gate was shut again, and the whole group was lost to sight beneath the waving heads of the corn.

"The cavalry look like plenty, and plenty tough," Frank Crown said quickly to O'Doghue. "I guess most of our fun will be with them."

"—Unless they fight a whole lot better than the chaps we chased up the tracks this morning," the Irishman told him, grinning down from one of the shaggy ponies. "See you out there, what?"

"That's it!"

Right above their heads then, the .75 gun served by Domeros and his crew crashed, and the ponies whinnied, jerked and went galloping out from the protection of the cut into the corn. Samuel was down behind him when Crown turned.

"The General ain't goin' to go on firin' that piece long," the little trooper muttered. "Them gunners up the' ain't bad; they chewed them tracks up nice. Next, they'll be puttin' down a bracket he'..."

Crown just nodded silently at him, then went running back along the side of the train. Domeros stood stripped to the waist upon the firing platform of the gun. He was singing, and smiled as he sang, ripped another shot out before he pretended to hear or see Crown and bent down towards the other man. "Cut it out!" Crown yelled up at him. "Romeran sold us a bum bargain with this one, if he sold us any.

"That piece up in the fort has got the elevation, and will knock you cock-eyed here in five minutes."

"So?" Domeros asked in a slow, dim voice. "But I have just caught the rear infantry company of that column, Captain. And, after a few more practice shots, I am going to try my hand on the fort and that other gun. An amusing thing, hey? Two guns, of the same type and calibre, firing from fixed positions." Then, though, he fully caught Crown's steadily staring glance. He slowly shook his head, shrugged one thin shoulder. "No, Captain; I am not afraid of death—not now. And I have had the b i g man, Singh Ghan, talk with my men here; They have said they are honored to work with me."

Slowly, Frank Crown smiled at him. "Okay," he said. "You win—General." He held his hand up briefly, took the other's hand, then turned and went along the train to where Tinna, Samuel and the column of solemn, straight-standing East Indians led by Singh Ghan waited him, their fingers tight about their weapons. "We go!" he told them. "We go now. For-ward—march!"

In the corn, they met with O'Doghue

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and his strangely garbed and equipped troopers, then went on with them, in the battle formation Crown had so quickly outlined on the train. They were perhaps three hundred yards forward from the cut where they had left the train when they met the first of the enemy. They were the bright-clad cavalry Crown had seen coming down from the town gate: small, hard-faced men who rode confidently and well, their lances at the charge position now, their Mauser carbines thrusting up from the saddle scabbards at their knees.

O'Doghue let them come on for over fifty yards, thrashing through the field, before he turned loose his own counter charge at them. Then he rode his men in with a headlong, crashing thrust, sending them forward in a column of twos, aiming squarely at the center of the loosely flung line ahead. The line gave, fell back, ripped apart, but then rapidly reforming around the young Colonel who led it.

"It's too bad," Frank Crown muttered to Tinna where they crouched knee-deep in the shallow mud of an irrigation ditch, the East Indians hunkered down about them calmly. "I guess Romeran and Yacatel lied even to these guys. Because they either don't know that we've got auto-rifles and grenades, or they don't know what auto-rifles can do.

"Singh Ghan! tell them to hold fire until the Colonel comes back through, then pick up individual fire on each flank."

Tinna was muttering to himself, turning the gun in his hands, sweat globules from his eyebrows falling onto his hands. "Hell, guy!" he grunted at Crown, "old greasy-gears back there, an' Irish an' his boys is th' only ones havin' any fun."

"Watch!" Crown commanded him sharply.

O'DOGHUE and his troopers were riding back and through. They came at the full charge, their crude lances discarded now, the machetes swinging in their hands, O'Doghue with an auto-rifle chattering at his hip. Again, hacking and driving at them as they passed, the hard-faced little cavalrymen tried to wheel away and let them go by, only this time far more stubbornly, and with a far greater toll of death for the passage. The young Colonel in his gold-frogged blue tunic and scarlet-piped breeches rode his big roan horse squarely at O'Doghue as that man hammered through, hauled up his saber and swung at the Irishman's head. O'Doghue carried no saber; he tilted the auto-rifle a little bit in his hands. The young Colonel died in his saddle, his horse under him. And then, as his squadron and troop leaders and their sergeants yelled at the troopers, Crown stood up straight in the ditch and gave the command his men had been waiting for so quietly.

Only less than a dozen of those blue-coated troopers got out of there alive, and they went wounded, dismounted and crawling on their hands and knees through the corn. Their infantry faced them, were charging past them, up from one irrigation ditch and over an open sweep towards another. Romeran led them, a machete much like Tinna had taken from him in one hand, an automatic in the other. Tinna laughed as he saw him. "He likes it!" he muttered, his auto-rifle bucking in his vising grip at his hip. "Th' dumb banana wants more!"

But then, ahead of him, a lemon-colored and flame-splashed wall sprang

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up and Romeran and the wave of khaki-clad men were lost to his sight; walking steadily, leading Singh Ghan and the East Indians, Crown and Samuel had just hurled grenade after grenade into the forefront of that attack. Tinna stopped the gun, hefted it in his hands, cursed and ran; in back of him, he saw O'Doghue was sweeping the little troop of cavalry out to swing the flanks, and in a moment he would have been alone here.

He came upon Crown somewhere out in the corn there. Crown had been caught by a spent bullet in the shoulder. He was down in a jagged fox-hole one of his own grenades had made while Samuel tied up the light wound with a ripped shirt. Beyond, Tinna saw in the shivering smoke and dust figures that were weird and immense, ran and shocked against each other in a dull clashing of rifle shots and the locking of steel on steel. "This here ticket ain't no good," he said savagely, slapping his auto-rifle stock. "How th' hell youse gonna use a Tommy gun in a mob like that? Even your tin apples ain't no good; them floppy-pants boys sure mixed it up in there fast . . ."

"That's the way they fight," Crown said to him. "They like a knife better than a rifle any time. And we didn't get Romeran; he got the hell out of here and back. He's got a lot more infantry than is in here now. Come on; grab up your rod and we'll get through here and see what's on the other side."

IN the middle of that mêlée, telling him by his booming voice and immense height, Frank Crown found Singh Ghan. He brought him and a dozen of the other men along, all but hit them over the heads before they could leave what was to them the insanely superb thrill of hand-to-hand fighting. On the far side, though, beyond the area the grenades had ripped, they walked into an immediate and flat fire; a company or so at least of infantry filled a ditch before them.

"Yeah?" Tinna asked, feeling a Mauser slug burn his thigh, then sent the auto-rifle kicking into action at his hip. "Let's see if youse can take it!" Then, pace by pace, quite slowly, he started forward, raking the lip of the ditch from end to end, stumbling over the smashed corn. On either side of him, he found when he had reached the ditch, Samuel and Singh Ghan had been walking, and that Crown had only stopped behind to haul more of his infantrymen free from the last of the mêlée."

"This here is better," the gangster admitted, heaving inert bodies up and out to make room for his own in the ditch. "But listen b a c k there; ole grease-ball's been heavin' them outa that .75 gun like a dime fer a dozen. Look, he's knocked that town gate kickin' and he's chewin' holes in their nice old fort right now . . ."

Samuel nodded, staring past him at Singh Ghan. "Sure," he said. "But, look right ahead he'. That must be two full regiments Romeran's bringin' up, an's he's got them Colt an' Maxim guns now, an' more cavalry. And we got a good fifty men he'; that's what the *teniente's* tryin' to do now—get 'em up he' an' set."

Tinna was squinting, running a fresh clip into his gun. "Gonna be dark in half an hour," he said. "I guess Romeran figures these baloneys o' his ain't afraid in the dark. If—" He swung his head half around. "Gawd!"

A roar that almost split their eardrums and knocked them headlong in

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the ditch had come from behind. Flame that was red-throated and yards wide had sheeted up from the clump of trees in back of which they had shielded the train and the .75 gun. "So long," whispered Tinna. "That guy, Domeros, wasn't such a bad guy, after all, but he sure is takin' one big ride now . . . That was the whole works, huh?"

Samuel spoke in a low, mumbling voice. "Nothin' else, I guess, Mister. Couldn't be anythin' but a direct hit. I guess now—now pretty soon we'd better start a kinda walkin' home." Then, though he too was silent, watching in the pale first shadows of the dusk the solid forming of the khaki ranks of the attack before them, the wide spread of the skirmishing lines of the freshly entered cavalry. Behind them, dragging close to the ground, skipping rapidly over the exposed places, they could hear Frank Crown and the men he had been able to salvage out of the mêlée. Crown crawled in between them wordlessly, made two quick hand signals to Singh Ghan, and the big ex-sergeant major turned and spoke swiftly, hoarsely with the newcomers, naming to them the places they were to take. But abruptly, Frank Crown laughed.

"Look out there, Flopsy," he told the gangster. "Do you recognize that guy?"

"Vigin," Tinna husked, hunching up in the ditch, his gun forgotten. "Vigin, an' the fat muzzler is carryin' a white flag. What the hell does that mean—peace?"

"PEACE, or a truce," Frank Crown said very slowly. "But, not a truce now. Because Romeran is crawling behind Vigin, and he's got a gun on Vigin's back. It's getting dark down here now; so dark that the fellows serving that gun up in the fort aren't sure of their range. But, they will be; they're able to see that white flag, and when Romeran lets Vigin stop, it will be right here. How about you; do you want him?"

Tinna made no audible answer; he was nearly to his feet when Frank Crown caught his arm, and he swung that off, went on, flat-footed, the gun low at his broad hip, a lash of bullets cracking around him from Romeran and the entrenched men behind. But Crown and Samuel could not watch him for long; Mauran O'Doghue was there, and O'Doghue laughed aloud, slipping down into the ditch.

"I went back," O'Doghue said. "I went back myself, to look for the pieces, after that blast in the cut. But that strange fellow, Domeros, is still there, and the gun is still there. He just said he got worried after a time; a lot of loose men running around and pot-shotting him and his crew, and all of that, and he didn't know that at any time a considerable force might break through and take the gun, and turn it on us chaps.

"So he took all but two of his shells back a bit, dumped them down in a little *arroyo* there, then pulled a grenade pin, flipped it in and ran. Almost shook the gun off its base, and nearly killed them all there from shock, but it certainly fooled me, and seems to have fooled all those beggars up in the fort. Because they've not taken a shot at him in minutes, and he's getting ready now to pot them; says he only wants his two more to do the job. . . There's one!"

They could hear the shell go overhead; then saw it strike. There was a purplish bloom of flame along the rock of the fort wall, an ebb of brief dark-

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ness, then an immense and lifting sheet of livid, carmine fire, an explosion which seemed to rock the earth under their feet down there. "The works—the whole works!" said Frank Crown simply. He looked up, and ahead. Flopsy Tinna was only half a dozen yards from Vigin now, and not more than twenty yards from where Romeran slid snakewise through the corn behind, a bayoneted rifle in his hands. It seemed that Vigin wished to stop, go back or run, aside, anywhere. But, he could not, and suddenly he lowered the white-flagged lance he carried, leapt forth with it stabbing at Tinna.

TINNA killed him with a dozen bullets, knocked him sidewise as he would knock a straw-stuffed doll, then whipped the gun around on Romeran. But Romeran was up, off his knees, and he staggered with the giant roaring of *El Justo's* exploding magazine on the mountain behind him. In that moment, Romeran must have laughed at death; for he shot twice at Tinna, caught him both times right above the knees, then bellowed at the men he had commanded, started forward alone in attack.

Frank Crown met him alone out there; behind, Samuel and Singh Ghan were leading the last of the East Indians in violent and sudden counter-attack and Mauran O'Doghue had gone running back to his troopers, to mount and race for the open, smashed gate of the now defenseless town. Crown had carried his auto-rifle in his hands as he started, but he dropped that, seeing the gun Romeran held, kicked up from the ground a piece just like it, a bayonet-equipped Mauser.

With those in their hands, they met and fought. Crown laughed as he fought, and talked from time to time to Romeran. He called him a liar, and a fool, everything but a coward, and told him he was too stupid to be that. He told Romeran that he knew that he, Crown, was going to kill him, because the bayonet was his weapon and Romeran's was the knife—the knife when a man's back was turned. Romeran tried to laugh back at that, then cursed. For Crown had asked him where Yacatel was, and the money Yacatel must have promised him all these months for all of this.

"Gone." The words broke from Romeran; they were spoken involuntarily, subconsciously. "Gone—and the money, too. Don't worry; you won't get any of it, *puto*—and none of Yacatel's sons will. Yacatel was in the fort, and the money was with him. Yacatel was handling that gun himself."

Crown laughed at him. "So you couldn't see how you could lose, either of you? Come on—lose now! Come on—after me!" With a kind of screaming, cursing sound, Romeran came on, after him, and Crown killed him, flicked his point away, wheeled, and came up from below, his own point shocking in right over the brass-edged cartridge belt. Romeran tried to rise then, get to his feet and talk, and when Crown bent down towards him, spat at him just as he died. In the darkness for a moment, vaguely hearing the rout and retreat of the last of Yacatel's infantry and cavalry before O'Doghue's smashing charge, Crown stared down at him. "Well," he said slowly, "when you went, the whole show stopped. Because there's not much more war around here now. So long, soldier!"

He did not bother to pick up another gun, or draw one of the pistols at his belt as he walked, two of the

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big Sikhs behind him, carrying Flopsy Tinna between them, towards the town where Samuel and Singh Ghan and the East Indians were now. Seeing him, the khaki-clad and leaderless men just turned and ran.

CHAPTER VIII.

"NO MORE WAR."

UP in a big, cobbled and dirty square that was called the *Paseo de la Nuestra Señora de Ventura,* Crown bivouaced the East Indians that night after he and O'Doghue had mounted to what was left of Fort *El Justo.* In the streets going there they met many men, civilians and soldiers, but all of them very nervous and all of them with their hands lifted prominently in the air until Crown told them to lower them. Those men were obviously honest, and sought only one thing: peace.

It was true that Bichi Yacatel was dead, they told Crown and the Irishman. He had died serving that gun up in *El Justo;* a few officers and soldiers had been with him, and the more forceful and trusting of his brood of s w i n e; the rest had died, like Romeran, on the plain, or fled. Palos Altos and Ventura were not Bichi Yacatel's any more; already, a mob had torn down a statue of him in the Paseo and was forming to enter and wreck the palace.

But a few of O'Doghue's big bearded cavalrymen peacefully dispersed the mob, set up patrols all around the Paseo, and Crown and the Irishman entered into the palace alone. The Sikhs had already brought Flopsy Tinna there under Singh Ghan's direction, and Samuel and Domeros were with him. Domeros stood nearly naked, his white cotton trousers ripped and widely torn; he was a little mad yet from the dregs of battle shock, stumbled and swayed as he walked. "Yacatel," he croaked, coming forth down a marble-columned corridor towards Crown and O'Doghue, "they tell me Yacatel is dead; that I got him, up in the fort. But where is Vigin? Vigin—"

Frank Crown took his shoulder, turned him and pointed. "Tinna got Vigin. But I guess there wasn't much kick in that job. And I got Romeran; so that makes us all square."

Flopsy Tinna sat in one of Bichi Yacatel's almost regal red velvet and white enamel chairs. There had been a canopy over the thing, and he had ripped it away, wore the fringed, heavy plush about his shoulders as a blanket. A doctor from the town Samuel had found had already come and cleaned and bandaged the two flesh wounds in his thighs and given him a sedative; he was on the point of sleep right now. He raised his head up, though, and blinked his eyes to focus them on Crown. "This all?" he husked. "Ain't there no champagne an' caviar, no crown around t' practice with?"

"Tomorrow we'll get you champagne," Crown told him. "You can bathe in it. And enough caviar to choke a goat. Now get some sleep, bohunk; you can dream about being president."

Singh Ghan stood beside O'Doghue, waiting, when Crown turned and stood back from the drowsily grinning gangster. The American consul general and the British consul general had just been stopped by the sentries at the door, Singh Ghan said. The gentlemen wished to enter, and to speak immediately with the American officer

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whom they understood to be the leader of the revolutionaries.

There was a row of gilt chairs along the wall where Crown stood, and he sat and then stretched out on three of them. "Ask them why," he told Singh Ghan. "And tell them I'm a very sleepy man." He and O'Doghue and Domeros were drinking from great pitchers of black coffee and held slabs of cold meat in their hands that Samuel had found in the presidential kitchen when Singh Ghan came back. "The *Sahibs,*" Singh Ghan said in his deep voice, "wish me to tell you that they must immediately know what the *Sahib* plans to do with the government of the country. If the *Sahib* will not answer immediately, they both promise to have American and British marines in here by tomorrow noon. They pointed out, *Sahib,* that there is an American destroyer already under way from Cristobal, and a British destroyer from Port of Spain."

FRANK CROWN drank the last of the coffee and wiped his fingers on his very dirty trousers. "Tell the gentlemen," he told Singh Ghan, "that they undoubtedly know more about the government of the country than I do. And that right now I want sleep and am going to go to sleep, but that tomorrow I probably won't know any more than I know now. Tell 'em, too, that I'm an infantryman, and never had any liking for marines, but they can bring in all the marines they want. This town is really dirty, and marines are supposed to clean up towns. Give the gentlemen my regards, Singh Ghan, but tell them I won't be bothered by 'em again tonight. When you've done that, find a sergeant for a guard you can trust, and get yourself some sleep; tell the consul generals to have the marines wake us up."

The marines came in from the South and East the next day, exactly at noon, in twin columns of packed automobiles and trucks that had followed the Camino Norte all the way up from Nuevitas. Crown and O'Doghue and Domeros watched them from a balcony of Bichi Yacatel's palace, the two consul generals, young, puzzled, but no longer angry men, with them. "That's nice of the boys," Frank Crown pointed out to his nation's Venturan representative, nodding towards the first car up through the gate. "The skipper of the American outfit has got Miss Kancavan riding with him. Miss Kancavan is Colonel O'Doghue's *fiancée,* gentlemen. I guess you'll have a wedding in the town here pretty soon."

"More than that," the representative of the United States to Ventura told him, grinning slowly. "The skipper of our outfit seems pretty damn' mad. That's a lousy, mudhole drive up from Nuevitas..."

"Tinna's found champagne," Crown answered him. "And Yacatel left the council room. Let's go down."

THEY sat there for quite a long time in that immense and heavily ornamented room, Crown at one end of the table, O'Doghue, Jane Kancavan and Domeros on one side of him, Tinna at the other, Samuel and Singh Ghan standing behind him, the consul generals and the senior marine officers at the opposite end. "The only thing I can't understand," the big, brown-faced Captain of American Marines said finally, "is what you *hombres* have been fighting for. If you wanted dough—"

"— We wanted that; sure," Frank Crown said quickly.

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"But, at the beginning, all any of us wanted was a little action. You know—we thought we were to do soldiering..."

"'Thought,' hell!" the Captain said, kicking back his chair and getting to his feet and nodding abruptly across the table at the senior British officer, "we came across that plain out there this morning, and we saw what you did yesterday. If they don't have peace and law and order in this place now with you officering the police force, it won't be your fault—and will be ours!"

The meeting broke up then. They stood from the table and shook hands all around. Tinna was the only one not to move; he had waved away the Sikhs acting as his orderlies, and he had hidden a bottle of champagne under the blanket covering his knees. Just as Crown was in the doorway following the marine officers out, he called to him, and the tall man turned and came back.

Tinna had the bottle out, was opening the top and cork with his immense fingers, let the wine spume foaming out across the council table before he shoved a thumb down and spoke:

"Ain't no more war, hey, soldier?"

Slowly, Frank Crown shook his head. "No, I guess not; not here, anyhow, fella."

Tinna held the bottle up, out to him. "Okay," he said. "But take a chew on that. Because this one was swell."

THE END

Plant Murderers of the Jungle

JUST as the human race has its killers in the form of gangsters and the animal world its destroyers as represented by members of the cat family, the plant kingdom also has its murderers in the sinewy, tropical vines called lianas. They are the plant stranglers of the jungle.

Any tree so unfortunate as to grow near the spot where the seed of a liana falls is doomed to destruction, doomed to death by slow, cruel strangulation as the vine climbs up, wraps itself, snake-like, about its victim, cuts into its heart and sucks out its life's sap. Day by day the leaves of the tree wither until it dies, bled to death by the treacherous liana. Then, when there is nothing more upon which to feed, the vine succumbs for lack of nourishment, paying for its greed with its own life.

White ants soon invade the dead tree hulk, reducing it to a hollow shell. Then the tempest rings down the final curtain on the forest drama. The carcass of the tree is hurled to the ground by the blasts, with the lifeless liana still clinging to the dry, powdery bark of its prey. There, prone upon the earth, lie victor and vanquished, waiting for the elements to convert them both into the dust from which they sprang—an example of the never-ending tragedy of the jungle, a mute reminder that it is not only among humans in crowded cities that the battle of life and death is fought.

Gerald FitzGerald.

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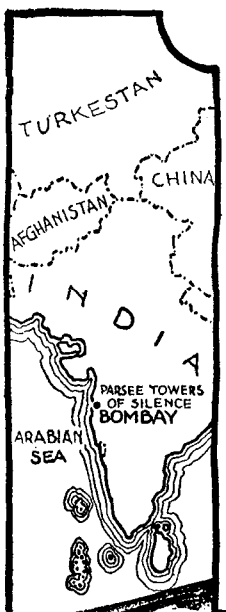


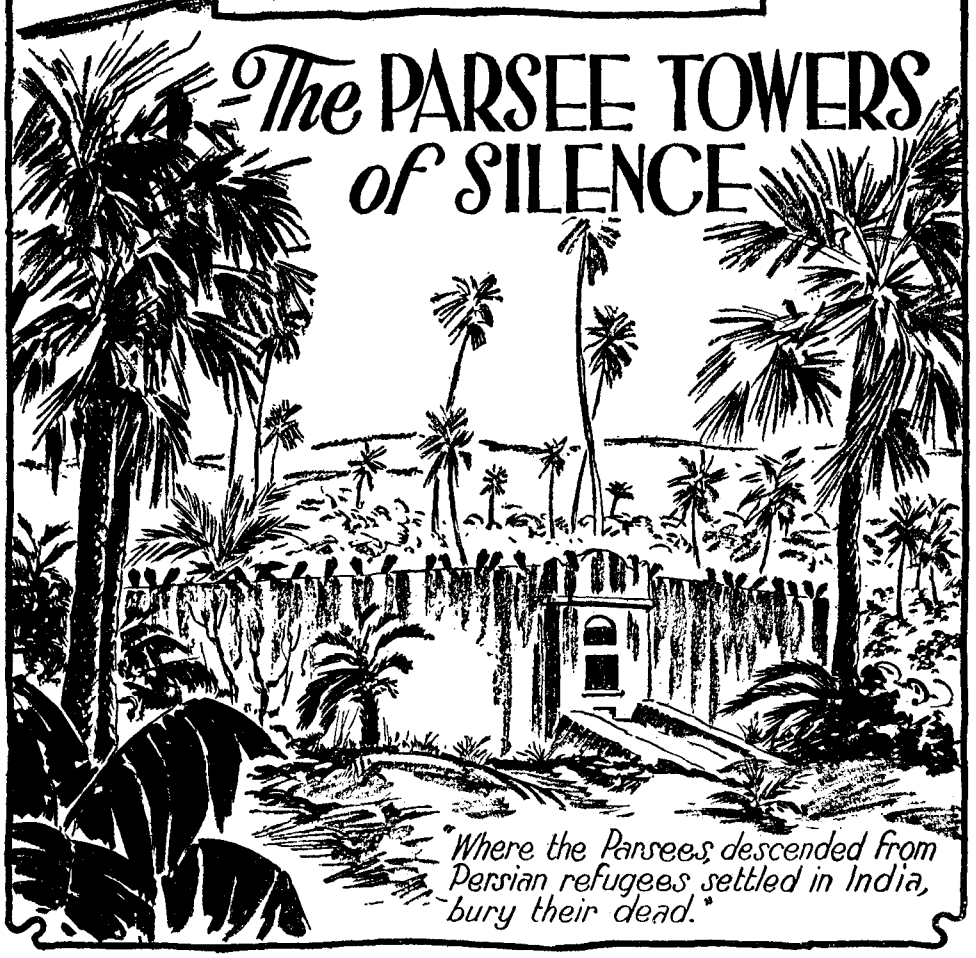
Wonders of the World

NOT far from Bombay, one may see on a huge hill the Parsee towers of silence erected for the disposal of the dead. These towers are part of the weird burial customs of the Parsees, who believe that in death rich and poor meet alike.

Four carriers of the dead place the naked corpse on a center platform, where within a few moments a swarm of vultures swoop down from their high surrounding wall and pick the bones, leaving them to bleach and dry.

Then with tongs in gloved hands, the bearded pall-bearers cast the bones into a deep well, through which rain water is constantly filtering, crumbling the bones to dust. This strange system is more sanitary than might be expected, for after forty years only five feet of sediment has collected in the funereal well.

The PARSEE TOWERS of SILENCE



"Where the Parsees, descended from Persian refugees settled in India, bury their dead."

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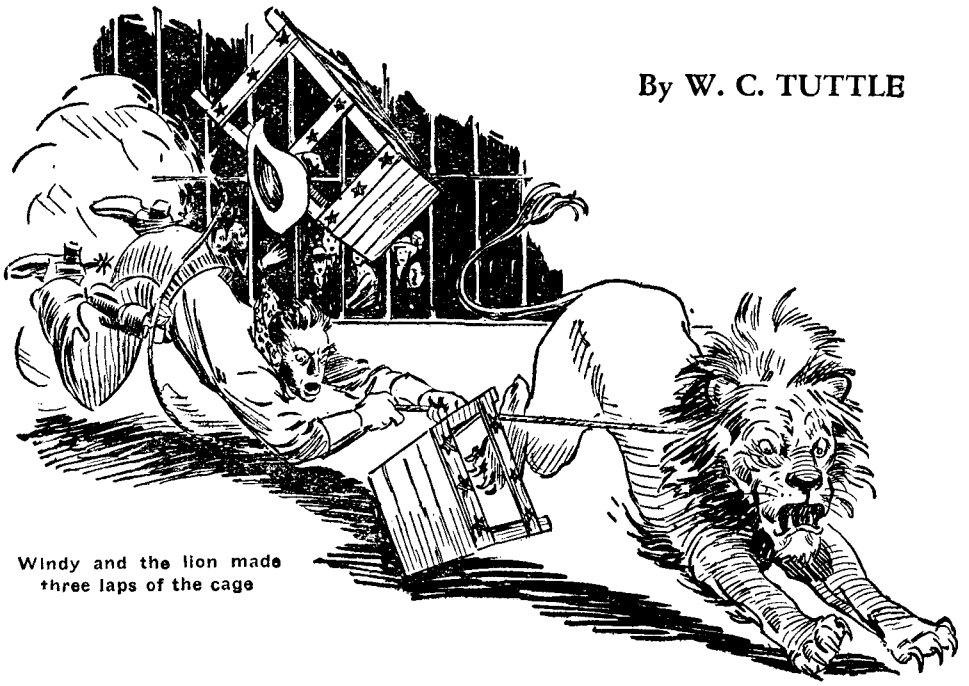
The Spirit of the Thing

By W. C. TUTTLE



Windy and the lion made three laps of the cage

Carnivals are sure good fun if you get into the spirit of them, those four rangeland roughnecks thought

THERE ain't never been four fellers that had worse luck than me and Windy Wilson, Silent Knight and Limpy Lucas. For one solid year the four of us stole cattle for Old Man Washburn, down in Scissorbill Basin. His idea was to build up a hell of a big herd, sell out the whole works and split it five ways.

The idea was grand. And then one night he spoke out of turn and went to his just reward on the end of a hot bullet. But before he died he made out his will, leavin' everythin' to some missionary outfit that was trying to groom a lot of damn cannibals for a white man's heaven.

Mebbe the profits from rustled cows will work out all right thataway—but it left us holdin' the sack, as yuh might say. Still, we knew where the old man had some money cached; so we landed in Dogieville, all set to take the town apart. We met Bill Spivins, the sheriff, and Huachuca Jones, his deputy, the same with which we goes into session.

"It's thisaway," explains Bill. "I ain't got a thing against one of yuh, personally. The law says such and so; and I'm her rep'sentative. What a man *has* done before don't turn my stummick against him. Therefore, you is all allowed to roam at large, as long as yuh observes common decency and

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a lack of desire to shoot yore feller men.

"We has with us what is knowed as Singer Brothers Stupendous Carnival of Unparalleled Wonders, which is labeled to contain all the wonders of the world, plus et cettery, et cettery. Dogieville is the chosen spot, wherein this aggregation lights to show off; and I have done promised my lawful allegiance to same."

"Meanin'," says Silent Knight, "that you backs this here carnival with all the law at yore command, eh?"

"Which is all the law there is," nods Bill Spivins, "and I shore administers same accordin' to my liver and lights. Hop to it, boys; but tread soft-like. Accidents might happen—but I've got a plumb critical eye for skulduggery."

"You ort to be ashamed—talkin' to us thataway," says Windy Wilson. "We're filled to the eppyglottis with the milk of human kindness, Bill. Why, if you only knowed it, all four of us contributed our year's salary to the savin' of cannibal souls. And you even presumes to hint that we might do somethin' wrong. I sigh for yuh, Bill."

"Yeah, I know," says Bill. "But what I said goes double. *Adios.*"

"Which fills me with resentfulness," declares Limpy. "How does you feel about it, Lonesome?"

"Well," says I, "if there's any resentin' to be done, I'll hold up my end of the deal.

"In the meantime, suppose we all have a drink."

"Not that it makes any difference," says Silent, as we wipes our shirt-fronts on the Roundup bar, "but my opinion is that there's too much law. While it don't cramp yore natcheral activities, it's sort of a drawback. It's kinda like old Swan River Reed was. A feller told Swan River that some'ers in his carcass is the germ of pneumony, jist a-waitin' for him to git in the right condition. It killed him. Not the germ, but worry. That's what the law does to yuh."

"That there's goin' to be wingding of a carnival, gents," says the barkeep, who nods to the name of Pizen. "She opens tonight with a flare, and she's good until day after tomorrow—less'n somethin' happens. I seen the lady lion tamer, and she's a dinger."

"Yea-a-ah?" says Windy. "Tights, eh?"

"Accordin' to the epitaphs they've done stuck on house walls. And they've got the strongest man in the world, and a snake charmer. There ain't much they ain't got, I don't reckon. They've got one of them there big wheels, with kinda basket jiggers, in which yuh ride. That snake charmin' idea kinda 'peals to me. I'm partial to snakes."

"It's kinda in yore line, Pizen," says Limpy. "But fill 'em up."

"Glad to," says Pizen. "Gents, how about takin' some raffle chances on a bull calf and a phonygraft. One dollar per each. We're rafflin 'em both off at seven o'clock t'night. That there bull calf is shore a dinger, and you know what a phonygraft is."

WELL, we had a few drinks and finally buys us each a few chances on the raffle. We don't look at the bull calf none, the same not bein' a curiosity to us; but we shore admired that phonygraft, with a big horn that looks like a mornin' glory.

"If I had a phonygraft like that, I b'lieve I'd settle down," said Windy. "I'd build me a home and set down to listen. It's shore a terrible pretty thing."

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"You talk about pretty things," says Pizen. "You ort to see that there lion tamer. Yaller hair and big blue eyes. Her photygraft is over there on the side of the stage station. She's makin' a lion hop through a hoop."

Well, we went over and took a look at her. Windy says:

"With her and that phonygraft, my joy would be complete."

Windy is five feet six inches tall, bow-legged, and with one eye that's kinda out of line. His nose is kinda antegodlin to the eye, all of which makes him look a heap like an experiment that didn't work out. I looks at him and then I looks at the lion tamer, and I says to myself, "Windy, you better be satisfied with that phonygraft—it ain't got no eyes."

But far be it from me to curb any romance. Silent Knight is almost seven feet high, and his prominent feature is his Adam's apple. Silent had buck teeth, over which he is allus tryin' to fold his lips. Limpy Lucas ain't very big, and in spite of the fact that he's spent most of his life in a saddle, he's knock-kneed. A sheriff picked him off a horse with a thirty-thirty one day, and he's limped ever since.

I'm the only one of the quartette that ain't peculiar. The Day family dates back a long ways, and is noted for deep thinkers. My grandfather thought deep-like for thirty-seven years—on one subject; but died, before anybody thought to ask him what it was.

Well, I got kinda strayed away from the rest of the boys, and I found myself out by them big tents, and here's a crowd around a feller, who's dealin' three-card monte. There wasn't any of them punchers wishful to buck the feller's game; so I asked him to show me how it's done. He had two red kings and a black jack, and the idea was to pick out the black jack. He had the rest of the deck on the table beside him.

A puncher bet a dollar that the jack was in the center, and sure enough it was. I tells him that it looks like a good bet to me, and I got up to the table. He throws the cards, and I says how much does you call. He starts to pick 'em up, but I says, "You leave that middle card where she is, Mister. I've got a hundred dollars that says I can pick up the jack."

He says, "Yore money's covered Mister," and I picked up the left hand card. He was sure sore, and wants to play some more, but I gets plenty smart. I takes the three cards and I says I'll bet I can fool you; so I makes the throw. Mebbe I'm clumsy. Anyway, he says, "Two hundred says I can call it."

We makes the bet, and he picks up the deuce of spades. I grabbed the money, and I says, "Never leave the deck handy thataway, Mister; and don't forget that monte is the national pastime down here."

THEN I went back to the Round-up Saloon where I buys fifty more tickets on the raffle, at half-price, 'cause the time was gettin' short. Windy ain't there, but Silent and Limpy was, and they're plenty polluted. I gets a couple more shots of fusel-oil and varnish, before the raffle starts; and it takes me quite a while to realize that Windy won the phonograph and Limpy won the bull calf. But I got my memory back, when Bill Spivins backed me into a corner and says:

"Lonesome, I've done had a complaint. The monte dealer says you

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skinned him. I've swore to condemn all such practice. He says you skuldugged him out of two hundred dollars."

"Well," says I, "am I supposed to break down and cry about it, or does that shrimp want me to apologize?"

"He wants his money back and no questions asked."

"And he sent you to collect it?" I asks.

"I said I'd do it."

"Bill," says I "you've made yourself out a liar," and then I hit him right in the nose.

I heard somebody yellin', "Hold him, you dang fools!" and I thought they meant me. Bill Spivins is pickin' himself up off the floor, and he's still in a stoopin' position, when a spotted bovine went past me, and hit Bill Spivins from the rear. Lookin' at it calmly, I feel sure that there must have been a rope attached to said bovine. Anyway, somethin' hooked my off-foot, jerked me upside down, and I went out of that saloon like the tail of a kite. My shoulder-blades hit the threshold, and I'll bet I was seven feet in the air, upside down, when the rope comes loose.

Comes a time when my branch of the family tree runs short of sap, as yuh might say. However, I finally finds myself out near the carnival tent, and here, in the light of one of them smoky, kerosene lamps, I sees Limpy Lucas and Silent Knight, standin' there together, lookin'. Limpy has that phonygraft in his two arms, and he's kinda peerin' over the top of the horn. Silent's got his arms folded, and he's kinda reared back on his heels; and beside him, attached to the rope that Silent's holdin', is a little spotted bull calf.

Silent takes a look at me, kinda peerin', like he wasn't sure, and then he says:

"Lonesome, meet Cæsar."

"My mistake," says I. "I thought it was Limpy."

"I mean the bull calf," says Silent. "We've done christened him. That's Limpy, behind the mornin' glory."

"Hyah," says Limpy. "Hast seen aught of Windy Wilson?"

"Hast not," says I. "Hast seen aught of Billyum Spivins?"

"Him!" says Silent. "He swears to shoot Cæsar. If he does, there's goin' to be a sheriff and spotted calf waitin' at the pearly gates together. Shall we move in closer and see what's to be seen?"

Well, we moved in closer. Folks kinda look funny at us, but we don't care.

Says Silent: "I hankers for a ride in that big wheel; and when I hankers, I takes."

"Yore hankers are my hankers," says Limpy.

"You can't take that bull ridin' with yuh, feller," says the hombre what runs the wheel. Silent looks at the bull and then at the man.

"Where I go, also goeth the bull," says he. "I pay his ticket."

"We don't sell bull tickets, feller."

"You jist prob'ly mean that you ain't sold none yet. This here is goin' to be a new experience."

WELL, the feller looks around, like he was lookin' for help, but there ain't no help in sight. Some cowpunchers are arguin' with the feller that runs the Wheel of Fortune, and there's almost a scrap in front of the place where yuh throw rings at canes.

Well, the big wheel is slowin' up, and when it stops, who do yuh think

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climbs out of one of them seats? Windy Wilson and a blonde. I hope to die, if it ain't.

She says to Windy: "Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson, but I must be goin' now."

Windy bows over and hits his head on a tent-stake. Then he turns around and hits this ticket seller right in the nose.

"Hit me, when I ain't a-lookin', will yuh?" roars Windy. He knocked the feller plumb back into the machinery that runs his wheel.

"Here's yore phonygraft, Windy," says Limpy. "You won it."

Windy took it in his arms, kinda beamin' all over his face.

"Well, well!" he says. "Doubly blessed. Lady Luck, I thank you."

Whap! That ticket seller got up and smacked Limpy over the head with a hunk of two-by-four.

"Hit me in the nose, will yuh?" he snorts. "I'll show yuh!"

Limpy goes down that lane, smilin' sweetly and knockin' down everythin' that's loose. He's been hit so hard he thinks he's young in the springtime. I reckon that feller mistook him for Windy, when Windy had the phonygraft in his arms.

All at once Windy yelps: "He-e-ey! Holy henhawks, I've lost all my money!" He sets the phonygraft on the ground and searches all his pockets.

"I had a hundred and forty dollars —and it's gone!"

"Who was the blond female?" I asks.

"She's the lion tamer, Lonesome. I've been ridin' five trips with her."

"You paid for it," says Silent. "Twenty-eight dollars a trip. No wonder she makes the lions jump through hoops."

"My Gawd!" snorts Windy. "Do yuh believe it? She was so nice, too."

"Kiss it good-by," says I. "You've still got the phonygraft."

"She said I was quaint," wails Windy. "What the hell's a quaint?"

"Society name for sucker," says Silent. "Well, I'm goin' to ride with Cæsar—he ain't no blond and he ain't got fingers."

"You ain't takin' no bull on this wheel," says the feller, moppin' his sore nose. "You git away from here and let the folks buy tickets. Right this way, folks! Greatest sensation of the age, and only two-bits a ride."

"No bulls?" says Silent. "Not any bulls a-tall?"

Silent shoves his gun against this feller's middle, real hard.

"One bull," says the feller. "It'll be a novelty."

"We better find Limpy," says Windy, takin' a firm grip on his phonygraft. "He was actin' awful young the last time I seen him."

Silent flanked that bull calf, flung him into a basket, and piled in with him.

"Cut loose yore roundup, feller," says Silent, his two legs wrapped around Cæsar's neck to keep the bull from jumpin'.

There wasn't nobody else in any of the seats, but the feller jerked the handle, and away they went.

"Yeah," says the feller, "and yo're goin' to keep ridin' until I get the sheriff."

THEN he stole the handle off the machinery and went away, lookin' for Bill Spivins, while a lot of people stood there, watchin' Silent Knight try to make Cæsar enjoy things. Me and Windy follered Limpy, with Windy still complainin' about that hundred and forty dollars.

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"I'm goin' to git it back, Lonesome," says he. "I'm a man of great determination and plumb reekin' with resources.

"But she was awful pretty. I've got to find me a dictionary and read what's a quaint. How do yuh spell it, Lonesome?"

"It's an abbreviation of damn fool," says I.

"There she is!" snorts Windy. "Here! Hold my phonygraft!"

I took the phonygraft in my arms, while Windy bow-legs his way down to where he seen that blonde goin' into a tent. People bumped into me, and I knocked off hats with that mornin' glory horn, but I didn't mind. I'm democratic thataway. Bill Spivins and Huachuca Jones comes along. Bill walks around me a couple of times, sizin' up the phonygraft and me, and then he says:

"Whereabouts in hell is yore cohorts, Lonesome?"

"Bill," says I, "my friends are enjoyin' the delights of the carnival and observin' the law."

"I'm glad," says he. "Not that I believe a damn word of it, but I'm glad you *think* they are. A feller jist came to my office and said there was four damn fools down here, tryin' to wreck the show."

"If you pick on me, you big bully," says I, "I'll make a wreath of this horn and crown yuh Queen of May."

"Ah-hah!" says Bill. "I smell skulduggery."

"It's Huachuca Jones yuh smell," says I. Huachuca comes up close and glares right in my face.

"Another crack like that," says he, "and you'll land in durance vile."

"And moreover," adds Bill Spivins, "I figure we'll jist take this here music-packin' whippoorwill and lock him up on suspicion. At least, we'll have one of the four in safe keepin'. Hold out yore hands, Lonesome."

I did; and in doin' the same, I dropped that forty-pound phonygraft on Bill's toes. I don't know what the result might have been, but jist at that moment Windy Wilson came out backwards through that tent door, spinnin' end over end, and he knocked Huachuca Jones and Bill Spivins plumb through the ring and cane game. Windy must have been throwed with sort of a under-spin, 'cause he stopped short and kinda rotated on the seat of his pants. I stood him up and handed him the phonygraft.

"Huh-huh-her huh-huh-husband is the sus-strong man," says Windy, "and that was her dud-dressin' tent."

"Where'd he go?" yelps a big-voiced jigger. "I'm goin' to bust every bone in his body! Callin' my wife a thief!"

"There ain't no use arguin' with a feller like that," says Windy, and we starts back for the wheel, where we left Silent and Cæsar.

"Is her husband strong?" I asks Windy.

"You didn't think I was turnin' handsprings for exercise, did yuh?" asks Windy.

I had a bottle of liquor in my pocket, so we had a drink.

"That feller had me kinda flighty for a minute," says Windy. "If I had his self-control, I'd have been hung years ago."

"Do yuh still love his yaller-haired wife?" I asks.

"Not at that price, Lonesome. Looky! There's Silent!"

That big thing that they call the Ferris Wheel is stopped, and up at the top is Silent and Cæsar. The man that runs it is back again, and he's

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kinda isolated Silent and the bull calf at the top. He looks at me and Windy and picks up a tent-stake.

"Do somethin', will yuh?" wails Silent. "I've associated with this damn calf as long as I want to. He don't like bein' up here."

"You'll come down when the sheriff comes," says this jigger, mean-like. "You've ruined my business."

JIST then along comes Bill Spivins and Huachuca. Bill acts like his rudder was busted, and it's all Huachuca can do to keep Bill in anywhere near a straight line. Bill's mad—I can see that. One leg is plumb stiff, caused by several of them canes up his pant-leg.

He's got a red ring hangin' over one ear, too.

"There's yore quarry, Sheriff," says the wheel tender, pointin' up at Silent.

"Baa-a-a-aw!" says Cæsar, lookin' over the edge of the basket.

"Goshlmighty!" yelps Windy. He shoves the phonygraft into my arms and takes off into the midst of that big wheel. Somebody knocks me sideways and I gits sort of a blurred image of a great big geezer, all naked, except for a spotted skin, chasin' Windy.

Bill Spivins went over backwards across a guy-rope, and jist about that time Cæsar let out a blat and jumped plumb out of that basket. Windy was through the wheel and headin' for the main tent, while the crowd splits to let him through; but the strong man never made the grade, 'cause Cæsar landed plumb straddle of his neck. Well, sir, that strong man was over six feet tall, B.C. (Before Cæsar), and when he got back to his feet, he wasn't over five feet, six.

Bill Spivins is on the back of his neck, tellin' the wide world what he's goin' to do to all of us; so I went away, still packin' that damn phonygraft.

I took another big drink and decided that I might as well enjoy the carnival.

Well, I'm kinda pesticatin' around, havin' as nice a time as anybody could expect to have, packin' a phonygraft. Then I runs into Windy, who is buckin' the shell game.

I says: "You dumb roadrunner, you can't beat that game."

"Lemme alone, will yuh?" he snorts. "Couple more bets, and I'll own the whole works. Have yuh seen anythin' of the strong man?"

"Not since Cæsar done his high-dive. Have yuh seen Limpy Lucas?"

"No, I ain't, Lonesome."

"What the hell!" snorts the shell man, lookin' past me.

There's Limpy Lucas, with a queer grin on his face, and holdin' to his hand is one of them apes, about three feet high.

"Meet the monk," says Limpy. "His name's Gug-Gwendolyn. Ain't he the spittin' image of Old Man Washburn?"

"Where the hell did you get that monk?" asks the shell man.

"I bought him," replies Limpy. "Paid a hundred dollars for him."

"Hundred!" snorts the man. "He's insured for ten thousand! Why, you ignorant old hill-billy, that monk is worth fifty thousand!"

"All my life I've hunted for a bargain," says Limpy, "and jist for them unkind re-marks, you go dark."

Wham! Wham! Wham! Limpy shoots three holes through the tank that holds the kerosene for the lightin' apparatus, and kerosene sprays all over

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everythin'. Well, I took my phony-graft and went away from there. No use standin' around in the dark, anyway. I dunno where Windy went, and I kinda lost track of Limpy and Gwendolyn, too.

I SURE didn't want to git arrested; so I went pokin' around behind things, and I seen a feller peekin' through a hole in a canvas. I can hear a flute playin' that hoochie-koochie music, and I figured that this jigger is gettin' a free peek through this hole in the canvas. He'd peek through and then jerk back. Then he'd peek through and jerk back again; so I says to myself, "I'll make this feller divide up with me."

So I kicked his feet loose from the ground, and shoved my head through the hole—and jist then a baseball hit me right square in the nose. I know it was a baseball, 'cause I found it later inside that mornin'-glory horn. I'm not very hard to rile, but that sure made me sore.

Then I almost bumped into Bill Spivins and Huachuca Jones, talkin' with a fat feller, who wears a hard hat and a fancy vest.

"I tell yuh, it's got to stop," says the fat feller. "They've done busted the Ferris Wheel, crippled the strong man, insulted the lion tamer, busted up the shell game—and Lord only knows what they're plannin' now."

Jist then a feller comes fallin' over the guy-ropes.

"Singer!" he calls. "Oh, there yuh are! Listen! One of them fellers bought Alexander, the trained chimp, from a drunken keeper for a hundred dollars—and the chimp's loose!"

"My Gawd!" wails the fat feller. "Them crazy cowpunchers will ruin me!"

"It's a nice night for it," says Huachuca.

"Huh?" snorts Fatty.

"Excuse him," says Bill Spivins. "The puncher that took the bull for a ride in the Ferris Wheel jumped out, too—and Huachuca happened to be under him. I'm scared he's runnin' a temperature."

"That's about all he could run," says Fatty. "But try to do somethin', will yuh?"

The sheriff and his half-witted deputy went away, and another hard-hatted feller joined Fatty.

"What a mess!" wails Fatty. "We're all primed to make a killin', and four half-witted hill-billies wreck us.

"They broke the monte game and smashed up the shell pitch. The only two decent dips we had was knocked out by that damn bull calf—and Alexander, the chimp, is loose—sold by that lousy, drunken trainer for a hundred bucks."

"Yeah, and the Ferris Wheel's busted," says the other hard-hat. "And the whole trouble started because Ophelia, the lion tamer, picked that bow-legged hill-billy's pocket of a lousy hundred and forty bucks!"

I took my musical burden and wandered back to the main alley, where I met Silent.

He's been drinkin' gin and he smells awful.

"You've got a awful lookin' nose, Lonesome," says he. "Let's go find Limpy and Windy and have some fun. Have a drink of gin?"

Well, I had a drink or two with him, and we went huntin' for the other half of our quartette.

"The sheriff's lookin' for us," I told him.

"He is? What for, Lonesome?"

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"General wear and tear, I reckon. The law's funny thataway."

WE found Windy and Limpy on the dark side of a tent, and they've got a rope on Cæsar. Limpy's got a bottle, which is welcome to me and Silent. We need somethin' stronger than gin.

"It's jisht like thish," explains Windy. "I've been robbed. I took her for love, and she took me for every damn shent I had."

"Swaller yore pride," advises Silent.

"Meet the monk, Silent," says Limpy. "Gwen-lyn, thish is Shilent."

Silent shook hands with Limpy, which was a natural mistake, under the circumstances.

"I've got a bone to pick with somebody," says I. "Look at my nose, will yuh? I looked through a hole in a tent, and some damn baseball player hit me with a baseball. I can't smell."

"That's what you think," says Silent. "But what'sa use of stayin' here? Let's go enjoy the show."

"I'm cogitatin'," says Windy, "and when I cogitates, I goes deep into the matter."

Silent looks at Gwendolyn and then at Cæsar. He says to the monk: "C'mon, git up here."

I never knowed that a monkey understood things, but that one did. He hopped up and lit right on Cæsar's back.

"Next e-e-event is Old Man Washburn on a wild bull!" announces Silent, and he gives Cæsar's tail a big twist.

Lookin' back on the situation, I'm not makin' any wild guess when I state that I must have been standin' in that coil of rope. I turns quick to see that buckin' bull calf, headin' for the open, with Gwendolyn ridin' high and handsome; and jist then my feet shot straight out and I landed on the seat of my pants, with the phonygraft in my lap.

I know we went the whole length of that carnival, and the seat of my pants was on fire long before we went through the snake charmer's tent. When the rope busted I had a collection of one midget, three boyconstrictors, a three-legged rooster and a wild man, who was so scared that most of his hair came out.

I shucked 'em all, except the phonygraft, and went huntin' for a fence to lean against. I wasn't interested in collectin' freaks, anyway.

"The meek shall inherit the earth," says a voice beside me, and I turns to see Limpy.

"It's a nice night for it," says I, "and I'm jist about as meek as a man ever gits; but I don't want any earths that's got bull calves and monkeys. I'm goin' to find Windy and give him back this damn phonygraft, so I can rest my two arms."

"I've got a quart of whisky—such as it is," says Limpy.

"I need it—such as it is," says I.

"Where'd yuh git them Injun pants?" asks Limpy. "You ort to have somethin' to hide yore shame, Lonesome."

I pulled out my shirt-tail and let it hang down over me, after which me and Limpy reduced that quart to mere scent of bad liquor.

"I'm goin' to gird up my loins and find Windy," says I.

"I'll gird with yuh," agrees Limpy.

SO us two girders went weavin' back to the flickering lights. We found the boss of the Ferris Wheel, still tryin' to make the thing run. He took one look at us, and faded

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out of sight. From the looks of that street, me and Cæsar and Alexander sure upset things. There ain't many people around on the street, but there's a band playin' in the big tent, on which it says:

OPHELIA AND HER TRAINED JUNGLE BEASTS

The feller who sells tickets didn't see us, until we're standin' right there, lookin' at him.

"I hankers to see a lion," says Limpy.

"Good," says I. "We'll put our two hankers together and see us some lions or two."

"The place is filled," says the feller. "You can't get in."

"So's hell," says Limpy, "but I ain't never heard of no rejections. C'mon, Lonesome."

The feller starts to jump out and stop us, but Limpy upsets his stand, and I seen the ticket man's feet wavin' in the air as we passes into the tent. There's a lot of people settin' there in seats, with the band playin'. There's a kinda big cage in there, with boxes and things like that in it. A feller in knee pants and tall hat is tellin' the folks all about Ophelia and her savage beasts.

Then a whistle blows and a bugle blares. There's some kind of a chute built from the back of the tent, which opens into this here big cage. About this time we hears a woman screamin' and men yellin', and this here canvas-covered chute bellies out, like a big wind was comin'. Into this here cage comes the biggest African lion I ever seen, and right behind him, hangin' onto a lariat and draggin' on his belly in the dust, comes Windy Wilson.

Him and that lion made three laps of that cage, knocked down everythin' in it, except one barrel; and then the lion stopped on the barrel, in order to tell the whole wide world that his cough was terrible.

Windy sets up, paws the dirt out of his eyes, and jerks on that rope.

"Huddem yuh, I said I'd take to yuh!" he yelps. "And what I takes to, I gits. Yo're worth a hundred and forty dollars, even if yuh don't smell good."

I reckon everybody is waitin' for the lion to eat Windy, when into the back of that cage comes Silent Knight. He's lost his hat, most of his clothes, and in one hand he's packin' that spotted skin that the Strong Man was wearin'.

"Stop me, will yuh?" he howls. The lion opens his mouth and yowls at Silent, who slaps him in the face with that spotted skin. It upset the lion, which backed against the cage and looked dejected.

Swish! Clank! I think it's what they call a Injun club. Anyway it sailed through the door of that cage and rickershayed off the top of Silent's head.

Silent grabbed the bars in both hands, bowed his head and said: "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray—"

"You stay awake, will yuh?" snorts Windy. "Who the hell do you think yuh are—Daniel? This is a lion's den—not a boodwah."

Out comes Ophelia and her Strong Man. She's wearin' tights and a spangled skirt, and she's so damn mad that her face is white. The Strong Man don't look so strong. He's got two black eyes, a busted nose, limps on both legs, and about all he's got on is a silly smile and a G-string.

"Hellup!" yells Ophelia. "Hellup! They'll kill Hercules!"

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"You gimme back my hundred and forty dollars, you yaller-haired sireen!" yells Windy. "I'm attachin' yore lion."

I dunno what Silent done, except that a section of that cage fell out. Mebbe he unfastened some doojingus; I dunno. Anyway, he fell out with it, and it made an awful clatter. The crowd kinda starts crawlin' over each other, everybody cravin' a back seat.

"Lonesome," says Limpy, "I reckon we better give Windy a hand."

HE picks up a coil of rope that's piled up there by a pole, and heads for the openin', buildin' himself a loop as he goes. Limpy is quite a hand with a rope. I went along with the phonygraft. I've heard that music hath charms to sooth savage somethin's. Everybody is yelpin', and I seen the band go right out through the tent, where there ain't no doorway a-tall, with lots of people walkin' right on their hip pockets.

"Turn him around, Windy, and I'll pick up his hind feet!" yells Limpy. Windy yanks on the rope, but Hercules jist sags back and makes funny noises in his neck.

I said: "I'll kick him in the rear, and I'll betcha he turns around."

That was the first bad mistake I ever made. I've even kicked mules in the rear and only had seven ribs busted. But I kicked him. If actual practice makes a feller an authority on anythin', I'm what you'd call a practical lion kicker. I don't suppose Hercules ever had anybody kick him in the rear end; so it was an experience for both of us.

I thought Windy had that rope snubbed tight. Mebbe he did; and it stretched. Anyway, that lion swapped ends quicker than anythin' I ever seen. Why, I hadn't no more than completed my kick, when Hercules had swapped ends and was goin' between my legs. That is, he tried to, but I bogged down on him about half-way, and we started goin' places.

Limpy dropped his loop, the same of which got both me and Hercules, and here I am on that lion's back, still packin' that phonygraft, my head and Hercules' both in the same loop. Lions are dumb. We made three turns of that cage before Hercules found the openin', and here we go toward the door of the tent, Hercules buckin' and howlin', with Windy and Limpy hangin' onto their ropes and diggin' in their heels, and Silent Knight chasin' the Strong Man up a tent-pole.

We're almost to the doorway of the tent when Bill Spivins jumps into the tent, with a double-barrel shotgun.

He yelps: "Stop, in the name of the law!"

And jist then Windy's rope busted, as he snubbed it to a tent-pole, and we hit Bill Spivins about eighteen, twenty inches below his shotgun. I remember that much, and then I kinda went comatose, as yuh might say. But I woke up, still ridin' the lion. My eyes ain't so good, but I'm still active in the mind.

I says: "I don't claim to be a lion rider, but I've shore rode you until yore hair fell out."

"Oh, Gawd!" whines the lion. "Will you quit. I never stole yore money—it was my wife."

I says, "Where's m' lion?"

"I don't know," he wails. "You've been ridin' me for fifteen minutes."

I thanked him for the ride, got a good grip on my phonygraft, and went wanderin', like a lost goose in a blizzard. I wondered if I was all that was left, until I runs into the fat feller.

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He jist took one look at me and says: "The one with the musical attachment—and still alive!"

I didn't stop to argue with him, but I did have a notion that the "alive" idea was wrong. I don't know how I ever found the livery stable, but I did. And there I finds Windy, Limpy and Silent, all settin' on some baled hay, lookin' at each other by the light of a old lantern. I sets the phonygraft down beside Windy, and I says:

"Here's yore instrument, feller; I'm tired of packin' it."

"Thankts very muth," says Windy. "I thee you didn't bring the lion."

"Didja lose some teeth?" I asks.

"Lotht all I had to looth. Lotht a hundred and forty dollarth, too."

He scratches his ribs, kinda jerks up and then feels inside his shirt. He hauls out a Bull Durham sack, looks at it and says:

"There it ith! There it ith! I put it there for thafe keepin' and forgot."

We jist sets there and looks at each other for a while. Finally Limpy reaches over and fools with the doo-jingus on the phonygraft, which starts it to goin'. It kinda goes *swuee-e-e-e, r-r-r-r, rur-rur—zee-e-e-e, rurr-r-r-r,* and then a voice says: "The End of a Perfect Day, sung by—"

Wham! Windy jerked out his six-gun and hit it dead center. Pieces of that phonygraft went all over.

Them carnivals is shore good fun, if yuh git into the spirit of the thing.

THE END

Fame from a Flea's Necklace

A FLEA plucked from the back of his pet dog in 1569 inspired George Scalliot, an expert locksmith of London, to set about and realize his life's ambition, fame and fortune from his profession. For over a year Scalliot labored patiently and diligently on his masterpiece, employing the most delicate workmanship, finally completing it, a novel necklace with lock, minute enough to adorn a flea's necklace.

The lock consisted of eleven pieces of iron, steel, and brass, which together with a pipe key, weighed but one grain of gold. The chain was made of gold and had a total of forty-three links. Together, both weighed but one grain and a quarter.

Immediately on finishing his masterpiece, Scalliot presented it to Queen Elizabeth in person, exhibiting the necklace with the aid of a magnifying glass, by putting it with a little difficulty around a flea's neck, astonishing her majesty by its snug fit.

The queen was so pleased with the demonstration and the marvelous pieces that she presented Scalliot with a generous cash gift of one hundred and fifty pounds or $750, a fortune for a locksmith in those days. The news of his masterpiece and her majesty's present to him spread rapidly throughout London and England, and he became famous as a master locksmith, which heavily increased his business. In a short time Scalliot became wealthy.

—*Clarence M. Fink.*

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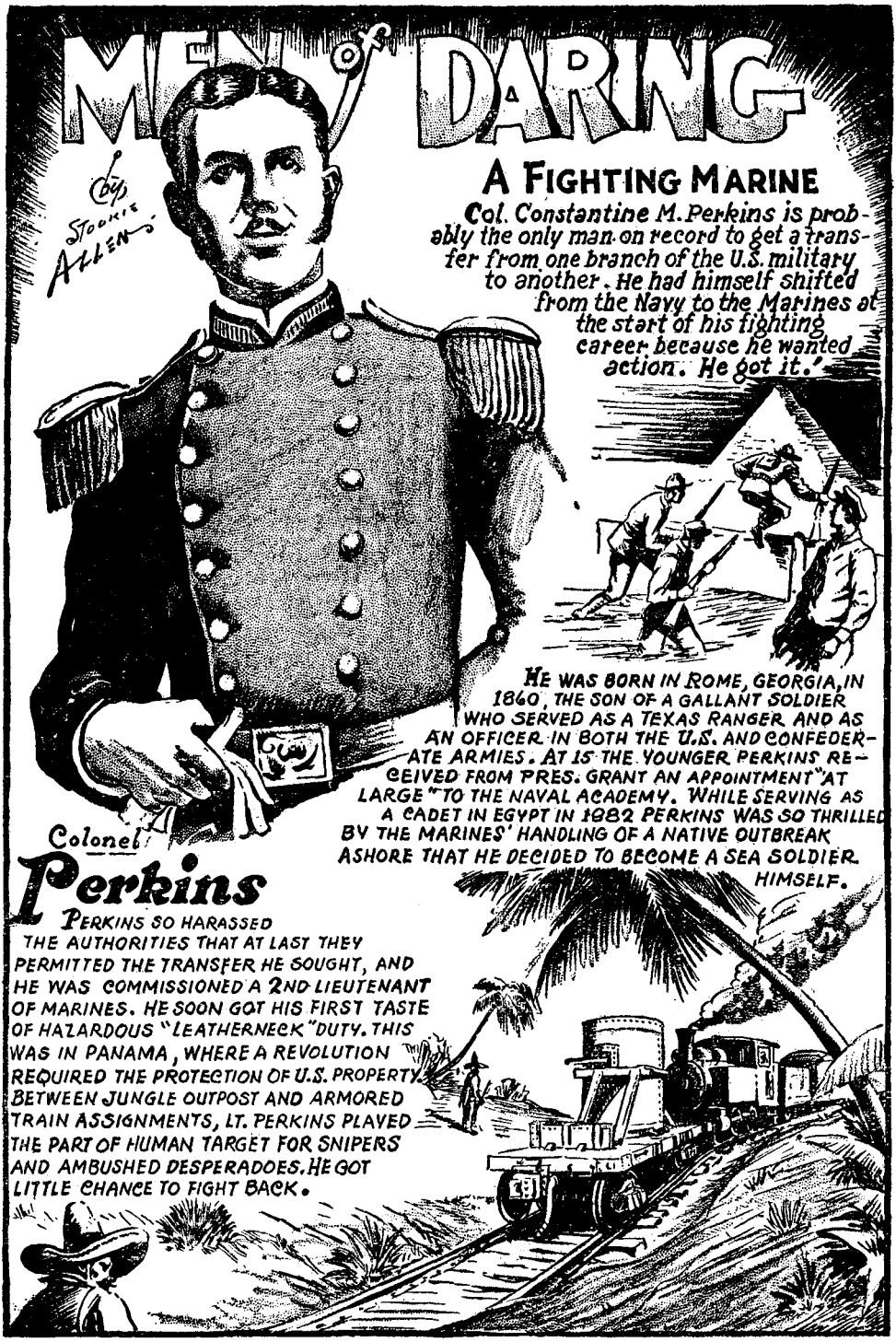
MEN of DARING
A FIGHTING MARINE
Col. Constantine M. Perkins is probably the only man on record to get a transfer from one branch of the U.S. military to another. He had himself shifted from the Navy to the Marines at the start of his fighting career because he wanted action. He got it.
Colonel
Perkins
HE WAS BORN IN ROME, GEORGIA, IN 1840, THE SON OF A GALLANT SOLDIER WHO SERVED AS A TEXAS RANGER AND AS AN OFFICER IN BOTH THE U.S. AND CONFEDERATE ARMIES. AT 15 THE YOUNGER PERKINS RECEIVED FROM PRES. GRANT AN APPOINTMENT AT LARGE TO THE NAVAL ACADEMY. WHILE SERVING AS A CADET IN EGYPT IN 1882 PERKINS WAS SO THRILLED BY THE MARINES' HANDLING OF A NATIVE OUTBREAK ASHORE THAT HE DECIDED TO BECOME A SEA SOLDIER HIMSELF.
PERKINS SO HARASSED THE AUTHORITIES THAT AT LAST THEY PERMITTED THE TRANSFER HE SOUGHT, AND HE WAS COMMISSIONED A 2ND LIEUTENANT OF MARINES. HE SOON GOT HIS FIRST TASTE OF HAZARDOUS "LEATHERNECK" DUTY. THIS WAS IN PANAMA, WHERE A REVOLUTION REQUIRED THE PROTECTION OF U.S. PROPERTY. BETWEEN JUNGLE OUTPOST AND ARMORED TRAIN ASSIGNMENTS, LT. PERKINS PLAYED THE PART OF HUMAN TARGET FOR SNIPERS AND AMBUSHED DESPERADOES. HE GOT LITTLE CHANCE TO FIGHT BACK.

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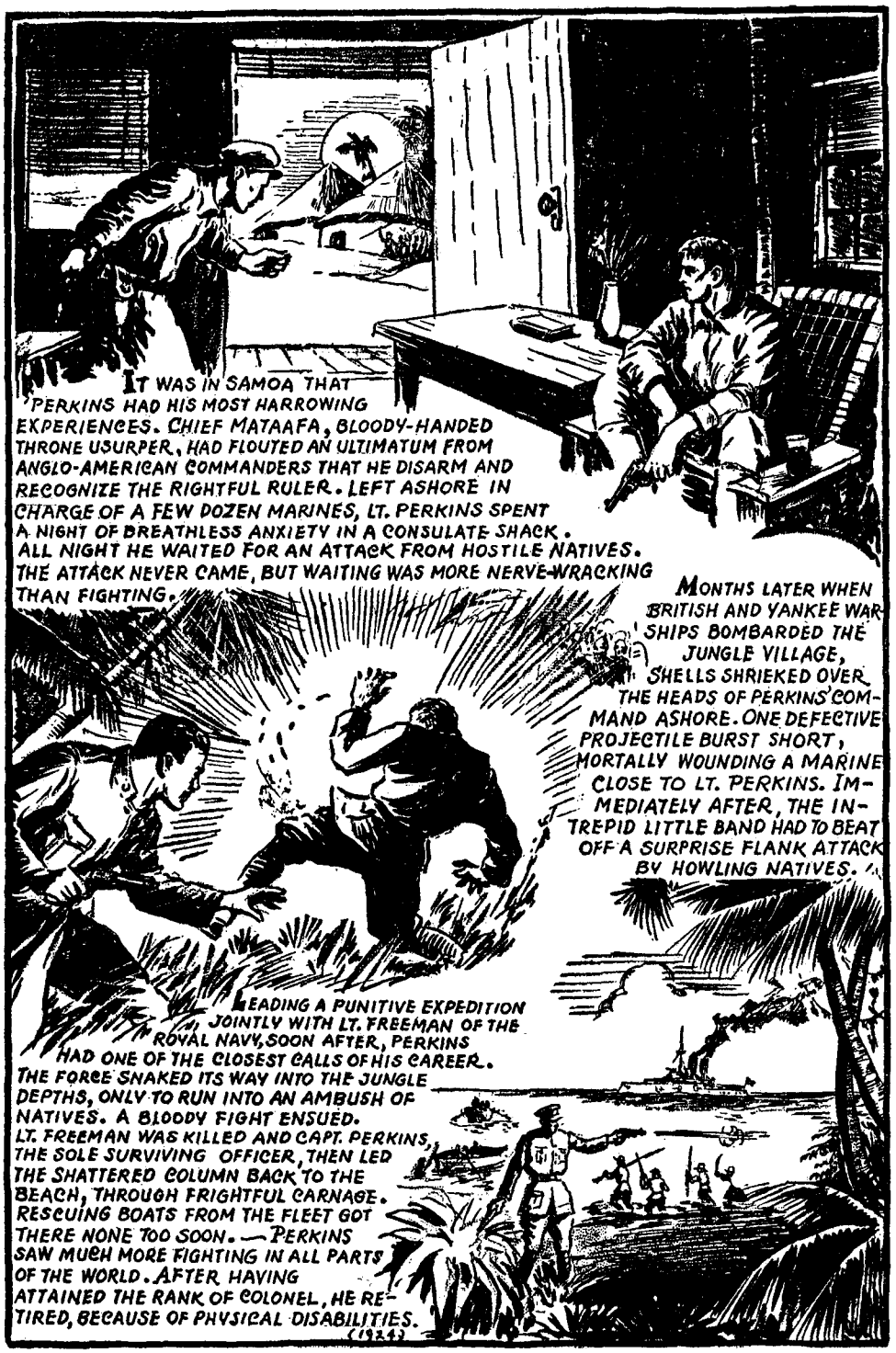
IT WAS IN SAMOA THAT PERKINS HAD HIS MOST HARROWING EXPERIENCES. CHIEF MATAAFA, BLOODY-HANDED THRONE USURPER, HAD FLOUTED AN ULTIMATUM FROM ANGLO-AMERICAN COMMANDERS THAT HE DISARM AND RECOGNIZE THE RIGHTFUL RULER. LEFT ASHORE IN CHARGE OF A FEW DOZEN MARINES, LT. PERKINS SPENT A NIGHT OF BREATHLESS ANXIETY IN A CONSULATE SHACK. ALL NIGHT HE WAITED FOR AN ATTACK FROM HOSTILE NATIVES. THE ATTACK NEVER CAME, BUT WAITING WAS MORE NERVE-WRACKING THAN FIGHTING.
MONTHS LATER WHEN BRITISH AND YANKEE WAR SHIPS BOMBARDED THE JUNGLE VILLAGE, SHELLS SHRIEKED OVER THE HEADS OF PERKINS' COMMAND ASHORE. ONE DEFECTIVE PROJECTILE BURST SHORT, MORTALLY WOUNDING A MARINE CLOSE TO LT. PERKINS. IMMEDIATELY AFTER, THE INTREPID LITTLE BAND HAD TO BEAT OFF A SURPRISE FLANK ATTACK BY HOWLING NATIVES.
LEADING A PUNITIVE EXPEDITION JOINTLY WITH LT. FREEMAN OF THE ROYAL NAVY, SOON AFTER, PERKINS HAD ONE OF THE CLOSEST CALLS OF HIS CAREER. THE FORCE SNAKED ITS WAY INTO THE JUNGLE DEPTHS, ONLY TO RUN INTO AN AMBUSH OF NATIVES. A BLOODY FIGHT ENSUED. LT. FREEMAN WAS KILLED AND CAPT. PERKINS, THE SOLE SURVIVING OFFICER, THEN LED THE SHATTERED COLUMN BACK TO THE BEACH, THROUGH FRIGHTFUL CARNAGE. RESCUING BOATS FROM THE FLEET GOT THERE NONE TOO SOON. — PERKINS SAW MUCH MORE FIGHTING IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD. AFTER HAVING ATTAINED THE RANK OF COLONEL, HE RETIRED, BECAUSE OF PHYSICAL DISABILITIES.
(1924)

Next Week: Glenn L. Martin, Aircraft Wizard

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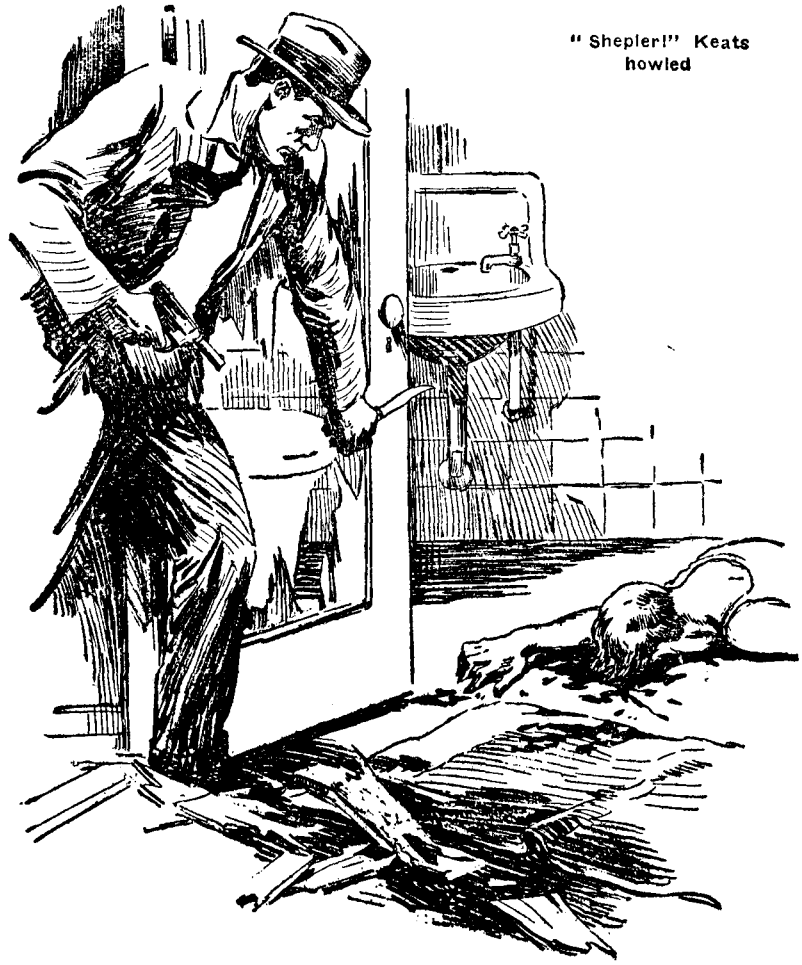

"Shepler!" Keats howled

War Declared!

By THEODORE ROSCOE

THE STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

Two important diplomats are found dead in a locked hotel room — and the war clouds gather over Europe

IN July, 1936, John Keats, American news correspondent, received two orders. He was to gain an interview with Count Vasil Garganoff, the Mystery Man of Europe, owner of the Hertha Gun Works in the Balkan country of Transylvania; and in the capital of Teutony he was to cover an important meeting between Baron Von Speer, Premier of Teutony, and Victor Gatreau, the Esperench Foreign Minister.

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Keats was able to see Garganoff only because the latter wanted to see Keats. The munitions maker brushed aside Keats' questions about his connection with groups that were trying to start war, then offered Keats $100,000 if he would take a two-year vacation, and cease his probing into and writing about the armament makers and their part in starting wars.

Keats refused the offer, and as he was leaving Garganoff's castle with Crazy Hooper, Universe News camera man, a bullet fired from ambush missed him by inches.

Going on to the capital of Teutony, Keats joined other star correspondents who had been assigned to cover the Von Speer-Gatreau meeting. There was Raoul Dubail, the Frenchman; Paul Emmerich, the German; Philip Shepler, the young Englishman; Kurt Nielsen, the Scandinavian; Anton Stehli, the Swiss; and beautiful Alexandra Frantsovna, the Russian girl. The press room in the Hotel Metropole was next to the chamber in which the two diplomats were dining and conferring, but the door was locked between.

Sometime during that dinner, while Keats was in the press room alone, a knife was thrown through the open window, clipping his shoulder. He forgot his own narrow escape, however, when a hysterical waiter ran screaming through the hotel, shouting that Gatreau and Von Speer, who had been locked in their room, had killed each other in a duel. No one had heard a shot fired, yet there the two men were, riddled with bullets.

Keats, investigating, found several empty revolver shells—*inside the press room.* He had just left the hotel to go to police headquarters when a bullet, fired from a window of the hotel, felled him.

CHAPTER IV.

EMMERICH.

THE air of the Café Guste, ordinarily a wholesome admixture of pigs' hocks and woolens and tobacco smoke and beer, had altered to an apprehension. Nobody shouted. Nobody slammed the door. Even "Gussie" himself, five feet tall and as many in circumference, two hundred good-natured pounds behind a spotless apron, moved nervously lightfoot with his stein-crowded tray aloft, pausing anxiously to catch a comment or answer a customer in low tones. Back of the mahogany bar with its glistening mirror, rows of stubby kegs, shelves of painted stone mugs with their silver roofs, Gussie shook his head at the foaming spigots and rolled uneasy glances at the coalscuttle helmet hanging over the cashbox. He didn't like this, *nein.* Not with the wife in the hospital having what certainly ought to be twins. *Ach,* and when he had just finished payment on the new piano for Frieda to take the lessons. It looked bad. Bad. Men running in the Telegraf office across the street. And talking, here, voices so low.

Talk was all right when it was loud. The favored clientele familiar to the Café Guste came here to talk as much as eat. From the great newspaper offices across the block they came; from the *Tageblatt, Abendpost, Zeitung.* From the International Bureau, too. You could tell the editors by the severe eyes of their spectacles (there was one with a face first cousin to the moose-head under the eaves) and the pressmen by the greasy overalls, and the young reporters who liked to throw dice, and the foreign correspondents by their accents. Talk was noisy and arguments voluminous over the red-and-white checkered tables. Inflation and horse racing. Elections and railroad wrecks and murders. The Café Guste knew the headlines before the world knew them.

And sometimes things that were not in the news—like the night Schnitzler's Work Troopers marched in and shot old Peter Schleuvag who had edited a

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Socialist daily under Ebert. Shot him right at the bar, and Gussie had smashed a bottle over one ruffian's head. Schnitzler, himself, had come next day to apologize, and the ruffians had been dismissed from his service. Dying on his feet, old Peter Schleuvag had faced the mob. "I am glad to die under a roof that once sheltered the immortal Goethe—"

Gussie, himself, had never read the poetry of Goethe, but he could read the faces of men, and tonight they filled him with foreboding. The nervous face of the Esperenchman whispering to the Swiss at a corner table. The Swedish gentleman who had joined them, and now sat lighting cigarettes one after another and throwing them away as if they were fire-crackers. Unmindful of the rain, young lads from newspaper offices hurried in and out and in again, exclaiming over latest editions. Steins stood at elbows, forgotten. Outside the soapy windows newsboys were calling. *Himmel!* And here was Paul Emmerich coming in from the downpour, wet clothes pasted black to his tall frame, eyes downcast under the dripping brim of his hat. How pale he was. Never had Gussie seen his friend so white. His pink fingers bustled to fill a stein which he slid across the bar with quick solicitude.

"For you, Paul."

EMMERICH'S shoes squelched water into the sawdust. Tucking a folded newspaper into a wet pocket, he leaned on the bar, lit a cigarette, smiling across the match at the damp moon of Gussie's countenance.

"*Wie besinden Sie sich?*" His eyes appeared to ignore the smoke-befogged buzz about him, kindly on the stout host behind the beer-taps. "How goes it, Gussie? Everything good with the wife, I hope. What is the latest from Frau Guste?"

Gussie polished his double chins with the hem of his apron. "The hospital at eight o'clock said it was good. I should hear any minute."

"And Fräulein Frieda? The piano lessons?"

"Such a musician, and only thirteen. You must come some time and hear her play, Paul." Stomach and cheeks pouted pridefully, then the blue eyes clouded. "Paul! Wet to the skin, you are, and cold—"

"It is nothing. The rain is like hot soup and will be good for the farmers." He accepted the foaming mug with a thankful nod. "But nothing to eat," he directed. "I've got to get going." But then, instead of drinking, he stared at the painted stein moody-eyed. "Gussie, do you remember that night outside of Ypres when we sat up to our hips in mud and the rain was coming like to-night? A couple of Scotchmen with a machine gun were giving us the devil—"

"Do I remember? Those men in ladies' skirts. Shot the corporal's stripes right off my sleeve, they did—"

"*Werhat das Schiefspulver erfunden?* You wanted to know. You asked me, do you remember? I would like myself to know who invented gunpowder."

"Gunpowder!" Gussie considered the word with concern. His eyes puckered at the helmet over the cash box, and he put a hand on his friend's sleeve. "What is it about, Paul? What is happening? Those murders this evening at the Metropole. I have not seen such an uproar here since the Haarmann case."

It was the quiet voices, the quick low voices over the tables that made

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the uproar. When a mechanical piano started suddenly with the melody of "Am Springbrunnen" somebody called quietly, "Shut the damned thing off." The music stopped with a jerk. Low conversation, rapid gutturals filled the smoky warmth under the fans.

Emmerich caught his hand shaking on the mug, and he quickly put it down. Nothing, he told Gussie, was liable to happen. The killing of two important statesmen was bad news, but there were always good men to take the helm. And had Gussie by any chance seen an Esperenchman, tall, with a limp, scar on his cheek, in the Café Guste tonight? Might have come in with a Swiss?

BEFORE Gussie could reply, a hand on Emmerich's arm pulled him around. His slow smile disguised apprehension suddenly quickened.

"Raoul! I was just asking for you."

Dubail snapped out a hand. "We saw you come in, Paul. Stehli and Nielsen and I—we wondered where you were."

The Swiss pushed forward. "Paul, what's up? What's new?"

Nielsen drawled, "I do wish your police wouldn't shut up like mousetraps. I can't get a thing from the Alexanderplatz."

"I got off my story an hour ago," Dubail exclaimed. "Then I ducked in here out of the sauce. Stehli came in, and Nielsen just got here before you did."

Emmerich lit a cigarette with studied deliberation. "Any of you chaps been back to the Metropole?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" Dubail growled. "I would just as soon keep out of there. That is why I came here from the telegraph office."

Stehli said over his pipe, "I am somewhat of Dubail's mind. Do they expect us to sleep in that bedroom next door to the dead all night?"

"What's happened at the hotel?" Nielsen's head came forward.

"I went back there from the *Tageblatt* office. The editors wanted a story on that waiter who served the dinner. Couldn't locate the fellow"—Emmerich narrowed his eyes—"and there's hell to pay in the lobby. Those drunken brewers." His glance met Dubail's. "I am surprised you did not go back there, Raoul."

"I am waiting a telegram from the *Etoile* editors. It will come to the Telegraf across the street, so I thought I would pick it up here. What do you suppose became of the English boy?"

"His paper owns a branch office across town," Nielsen suggested. "The Russian girl was late, and will have a time getting a wire to Moscow. The American was smart. They lease a cable for their special flashes. He could take his time writing his story."

"Where do you suppose Keats is? Usually he comes here. His story will be in New York before mine is in Lucerne."

Dubail turned to the Swiss. "But if I had suspected such a story to break from this cursed conference, I too would have leased a wire. I do not like this affair, my friends. Tomorrow's inquest will tell. Perhaps the police will back down on their hasty conclusions." He raised his eyebrows at Emmerich.

"No," Emmerich dissented. "Police Chief Von Guhle does not make decisions without certainty. His standing as a criminologist cannot be challenged. I covered police court for years and have never heard him at fault. But it is my opinion the Esperench minister must have gone insane—"

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Nielsen asked, "Do you think war will come from this?"

"War!" Anton Stehli flung up an arm. "There was never any end to the last war, do you know that? You cannot end wars by signing a sheet of foolscap. As for Teutony, this country has been at war ever since the republic collapsed and Schnitzler came to power. War is a state of mind. This country has that state of mind. The fighting psychology. Propaganda everywhere. Such as that." He stabbed a finger at a black-lettered placard fastened above the bar mirror. The slogan read: "Only the wicked cannot bring themselves to love August Schnitzler." "Propaganda!" Stehli iterated fiercely, gesturing his pipe. "That is the first gun in any war. What nonsense. Bah! Am I a wicked man? But I do not love August Schnitzler!"

A CHAIR scraped the floor behind the fulminating Swiss. Commotion. A broad-shouldered man, heavy-jowled, beady eyes glaring under an inflammatory shelf of forehead, surged up in the smoke. He wore the ink-smudged overalls of a press hand; and his muscled arms, shirt sleeves rolled back, flexed upward like the arms of a wrestler. His face was contorted, darkly grotesque. His thick voice bassoed at Stehli.

"Jew! Who dares speak of *Der Meister* with such insolence—"

The Swiss lifted his shoulders calmly; removed pipe from lips without concern. Smoke swam through his bushy mustache. "I do."

The man booted his chair aside. "You hook-nosed old rat—"

"Just a minute." Wheeling swiftly, Emmerich stepped toward the press hand. "These gentlemen are friends of mine," he instructed crisply. "I am Paul Emmerich of the *Tageblatt*. I do not know you. Sit down."

The man sat down.

"Stehli," Emmerich advised in English, "I know how you feel about these things, but just now it might be wise to be careful. Mob spirit, you know what that is. The riot at the hotel was pretty bad. And I meant to tell you"—he included the others with a guarded gesture—"things are off to a serious start. I don't know why the government has shut down on all long-distance telephone service, but the long lines are all *verboten*. The editors are on their toes waiting to hear word from the High Command. Somebody, nobody knows where the report came from and it's not been verified, started the rumor that Esperance has called a special session in their War Office—"

Dubail's black eyes went luminous. "*Sacré!* I cannot believe."

"It came through to our editorial office," Emmerich insisted, "and there are some damned queer—well, unexplainable aspects to the Hotel Metropole tragedy." His glance traveled the faces grouped about him. "*Ja*, and once a rumor starts, there is no stoppage of the thing. Teutony may proclaim *Kreigsgefahrzustand*, or 'condition-of-danger-of-war.' I'd advise you chaps to cash all travelers' checks as soon as you can. And here's something straight from the inside. *Der Meister* is on his way to the capital from the south, coming by special plane."

A little bomb of smoke burst from Stehli's lips. "Schnitzler himself is coming!"

"Bones of Queen Christina, that is a tip!" Nielsen stabbed his monocle into a kindled eye. "Schnitzler rushing back from his vacation, eh? I'll shoot a wire to the S.P. at once; and then I've got to get back to our mourgish hos-

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telry and try to dig up that xanthorous public stenographer out of some traveling salesman's room." He flirted a hand, swooping himself for the door. "This begins to look like something. See you later—"

"*Morbleu!*" Dubail jammed on his hat. "I must wire the *Etoile* Service. A thousand thanks, Paul, for the news."

Stehli had followed Nielsen for the telegraph office. Through the rain-curtained window Emmerich could see them as two shadows crossing the stormy gulf of the street. He made a restraining gesture, half controlled, toward Dubail's retreating back.

"Raoul!"

The other swung about with a limp. Something in Emmerich's expression brought a startled lift to Dubail's mobile eyebrows. "What is it, Paul?"

But Emmerich was merely smiling, extending a hand. "Nothing, my friend. It is eleven o'clock; I only wanted to say I would not be here if you came back from the Telegraf. I shall go out home for a while. If I do not see you—why—*Auf Wiedersehen.*"

Dubail's slim hand gripped with comradely pressure. "Remember me, Paul, to that charming mother of yours. *Au revoir.*"

THERE are few private houses in the Teutonic capital, but some distance beyond the outlying apartment districts the Carlottenburgstrasse quiets into an old-fashioned avenue patrolled by ancient elms and fronted by the hedgerows, formal gardens and arched iron gateways of venerable estates.

Standing proudly back from the road, the Emmerich mansion overlooked a secluded slope, flower beds on one side, willow pond on the other. From the front hedge one could not discern a need of repair, tile patched on roof and gable, the top floor shuttered dark, panes broken from the cupola. One could not see patient mending in the lace window curtains, or the garden, homely with cabbage and potato, at the mansion's back.

Paul Emmerich dismissed his cab at the gate, and swung on foot up the weedy gravel drive. The rain had quit at the moment of his leaving the Café Guste, and now the night drained and steamed. Clouds hung in green tatters on the pale shoulder of a drowned midsummer moon. Moonlight lay blue on the untrimmed lawn, silver on the dripping twigs of the elms. There was warmth in the smell of drenched grass. A frog cleared its throat in the willow pond where once Paul had raced sailboats with his brother Wolff—

His mouth set in a harsh downward curve. Wolff was gone, no use calling up memories. No use remembering anything. A lot of things he'd have to forget this night. His hand slid down over the folded newspaper in his pocket, fingers closing on a heavy blunt object secreted in this wrapping. Thank Heaven they hadn't noticed the bulging pocket at the Café Guste!

He muttered "*Gott!*" throatily, and, nearing the house, was sorry to discover light in the curtains of the library and a lamp-shine in the window of his mother's room upstairs. Going quietly into the vestibule, he spoke a subdued greeting to Schnapps, the brown velvet Dachshund, then straightened his shoulders with an effort and turned into the library.

At the far end of the book-walled room his father sat under the mellow aura of a tasseled reading lamp, feet in carpet slippers, meerschaum in

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teeth, ashes down the front of his flower-patterned smoking jacket, engrossed in writing. Hearing his son's entry, Balduin Emmerich brushed aside his pad, gripped a stout cane and reared from the shabby armchair.

"Paul! I have been hoping you would come." His voice was gruff, virile. No wincing from the neuritis that had troubled him lately. One read intolerance for wincers in the leonine head, the underthrust of the jaw, dominant brows, the level demand of steely eyes. Seventy years had not dimmed the gleam of those eyes; he looked forty-five, hardly ten birthdays beyond his son. A Junker. A Teuton of the Old School.

STRAIN thickened Paul Emmerich's speech. "Father, I—I've just come from the *Tageblatt* office. Something happened tonight—"

The heavy man drove his cane into the rug. "*Ja!* At the Hotel Metropole. That swine of an Esperench minister killed our Iron Premier—"

"You know, then?"

"It was announced over the radio. Your Uncle Gottlieb was here and we were playing chess. A special announcement over DRX. Your uncle left at once for General Headquarters at the War Department, saying he might return later and would wish to see you. They telephoned for him."

"G. H. Q. put in a hurry call for Uncle Gottlieb?" Paul lit a cigarette, hiding worried eyes. "Do you like the sound of that?"

His father's face smoldered, blazed. "*Aber,* I can tell you something you may like the sound of! You know my lawyers were about to put me through bankruptcy; your mother and I were on the verge of losing this house!"

Color recurred and faded in Paul's cheek bones. He had known of nothing else for the past twelvemonth. His father storming home from the factory, pacing the floor, bursting into impassioned rages at the morning mail. His mother, silent as always, moving about the old rooms with that expression of resignment in her eyes. Paul had a way of turning pale under emotion.

"Well," his father exclaimed triumphantly, "I am not to go bankrupt, *nein!* Not half an hour after Uncle Gottlieb left the house, the phone rang again. Listen! My factories go under government subsidy tomorrow morning. They are taking every bit of stock, all the material that has been idle in my warehouses for the last ten years!" His voice rang down the room. "Fifty thousand leather belts at once. Five hundred thousand leather straps! Every scrap of leather will go the first thing in the morning. Government order!"

Paul flung himself into a chair and watched his father's face, shading his gaze with a white hand. Herr Emmerich might otherwise have noticed a strange light under his son's lowered lids.

"The Emmerich Leather Company is saved!" Balduin Emmerich thundered. "That is not all. I had scarcely put down the phone when Herr Borger called from his brokerage office. He asked for you! *Ja,* he wanted to buy all those Central Chemical bonds your Aunt Elizabeth left you—"

"I know," Paul said expressionlessly. "He phoned me while I was at the *Tageblatt,* just before ten o'clock. Offered me four *marks* a share."

"And he called here to offer you thirty a share!" Paul's father cried. "Seemed beside himself with anxiety to buy them, too. Thirty a share for

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those chemical bonds that last week were not worth a *guilder*. You will be rich, Paul! Rich!"

"You are elated, father?"

"Elated? Emmerich Leather saved from bankruptcy. My son suddenly rich. My house saved, no more of these tradesmen who are not fit to wipe their boots at the door making insolent demands of your mother and me. All this at one stroke, and you ask me if I am elated!"

Paul Emmerich said in a monotone, "Buying leather. Buying chemicals. Calling Uncle Gottlieb. No doubt you are aware of what must lie behind this unusual turn of events—"

"Shades of Friederich Wilhelm," his father exploded. "We are suddenly rescued from miserable poverty, and you sit there in that wet dinner suit white as a drowned cat. I could never understand you, Paul."

He countered in quick resentment, "You might be pale yourself, father, if you did the job I had to do tonight. That dirty assignment—"

"What assignment, Paul?" His mother's quiet voice in the doorway brought him out of his chair.

INSTANTLY his features warmed to a smile and he hurried to take her by the hands; forced a laugh, pretending to admire her faded lavender dress, with its high lace collar and old-fashioned sleeves. She was small and stately, her face delicately lined under silvered hair, and she was not fooled by his chuckle. "Paul, you are ill—"

"Never better in my life, *Mutterchen.*"

"Running about in the rain. You saw that dreadful business at the Metropole—"

He patted her hands. "It was not exactly a cheerful evening. But that is the reporter's job. Father has told you his good news?"

She nodded, watching his eyes.

"I am glad," he said firmly. "Now, then, don't you worry about that Metropole affair. I believe the Esperench minister went insane—"

"The radio announcement," Herr Emmerich boomed, "claimed the Esperenchman deliberately started shooting at Baron Von Speer, after inviting him to that private dining room and making sure nobody would come in. *Ja!* A plan to assassinate our strongest man under Schnitzler. I tell you, and I have always said, the dirty Esperenchmen are scoundrels to the last man—"

Paul reminded, "You enjoyed meeting Raoul Dubail, father."

"The newspaper fellow? He is not typical. You yourself said he appreciated the Teutons. *Gott sei dank!* our country is in a position of strength and must not take these criminal acts from the Quai d'Orsay any more. I say Esperance will pay for this crime. Pay through the nose!"

Balduin Emmerich shook a fist over his head.

"Too long we have been ground under heel by those dogs across the Rhine. We lost the war twenty years ago, and honorably signed for peace. But they kept at us, those Allies. Spurred on by that accursed Esperance. Was it not enough that we were beaten? *Nein,* but they had to starve us, undermine our finances, ring us in with steel, surround us like a land of criminals. Now they have murdered our Premier! But this time, maybe, we hit back!"

His massive voice grew in the lamplight, sentences punctuated by furious thumpings of the cane. "Despite her

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Allies of today, Esperance is secretly hated by every country. You think the United States would aid her after she cheated the Americans of their loans? England will sit quiet, too, and *Herr Gott!* she had better not interfere this time, or London will be blown to a heap of bricks.

"Soviet Russia will not help Esperance. To invade us she would have to cross Poland, and Moscow dare not move with Japan on her tail. Italy will not help, now that the Duce has gone to his heavenly reward—whatever that might be—and the Italians lack a leader.* For all her famous alliances, Esperance may find herself alone in combat and have to fight even for once!"

"Please, Balduin," Paul's mother soothed. "You are so excited tonight. Your heart—"

HERR EMMERICH stamped the floor. "This is the best thing in the world for my heart; *ja*, it is! I say it is high time we had a reckoning with those murderous Esperench, and every good Teuton in the empire feels the same way."

He stabbed his cane at a map of Europe enshrined above the library desk; this was a never-tiring tirade for Balduin Emmerich. "Esperance! Alone she sits across the Rhine, thumb to nose, whiplash in fist. But *Der Tag* will come yet. Thank the good God for a strong man like August Schnitzler—"

Paul said quietly, "Only a short time ago you did not think so highly of August Schnitzler—"

"The murder of our Premier," his father boomed, "is an attack on our country. A nation's honor is above party politics. If Schnitzler is strong enough to defend our honor, I stand behind him with all my heart!" He struck the map with his stick. "We must move quickly, so! This time we go through Switzerland. We go around that beautiful wall of forts the Esperench have built between Belgium and Alsace. Ho-ho! While our bombing fleet flies straight to the Esperench capital, our army sweeps through Godek Pass in the Swiss Alps!"

"But Godek Pass was given to Helvania after Austria was broken up by the Treaty of 1935," Paul protested. "A move through that mountain corridor would involve us in war with the Kingdom of Helvania!"

Herr Emmerich regarded the blue-bordered Kingdom of Helvania with contempt. "Then we will take Helvania! Switzerland, Esperance, Helvania, we could smash them overnight, we who stood against the whole world—"

"Balduin, please," Paul's mother begged. "The doctor would not like you to work yourself up like this. The doctor—"

"Bah for the doctor! I am as good as ever. I tell you, I would go myself, if I had the youth."

"Go?" Frau Emmerich looked from husband to son in alarm.

Paul's arm hurried about his mother's shoulder. "*Mutterchen!* No need for all this. Father always talks this way. Nothing will happen."

Herr Emmerich's face veined crimson. He shouted, "But if something does happen it will happen fast. Air transports and motor trucks are not the slow infantry of twenty years ago. We went through Belgium last time

*Author's Note: The story takes place in 1936. The author assumes for fictional purposes, without pretending to prophesy, a hiatus in the Italian Dictatorship.

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and were stopped within twelve miles of the Esperench capital. This trip we go through Switzerland and do not stop!" His cane was a sword lashing the lamplight. "The whole world helped Esperance the last time, and we lost. This time nobody helps them—and we do not lose!"

Cracking into a throttled cough, his voice choked in his throat and he stumbled backwards, cheeks blown, eyes smudged, cane shaking for support. Paul's gasp was echoed by his mother's frightened cry, but Herr Emmerich waved them off, body struggling in inward fury. Normal color returned to his face as he found his chair, where he sat in sullen abeyance and opened one furious eye to glare witheringly at the knees that had betrayed him.

"I envy you, Paul," he panted after a little. "If I do not see the day for the Fatherland, it may come for you."

THEY had not heard the big car wheeling up the drive. In the vestibule the Dachshund barked; then rapid steps in the hall brought a visitor into the library. A stocky man who bowed, yanked off gauntlets and spiked helmet, came down the room with a faint clinkle of body harness, the gray skirts of his military field coat rustling at the calves of polished boots. Above the chesty buckles and tabs of a ranking general his shaved head was rigid, features saturnine, unsmiling, eyes directed at Paul.

"Gottlieb!" Paul's mother held up a cautioning hand. "Balduin has just suffered an attack—"

The general gave his sister a curt nod. "Hello, Pauline." A solicitous grimace at his brother-in-law. "Too much excitement, eh? A little quieter you should stay. But I think Balduin may not be the only one to suffer an attack." He swung at Paul. "Report has come that Esperance has cancelled all military furloughs and started a secret mobilization. And Schnitzler has declared condition-of-danger-of-war!"

Balduin Emmerich sat up fiercely. "*Kreigsgefahrzustand!*"

The general nodded sternly; shot back his cuff to inspect his wrist dial. "I have only a minute to speak with Paul. I must hurry."

Paul's lips had whitened. He began, "I'd like to thank you, Uncle Gottlieb. What you did to help father. The government order for leather—"

"The least I could do. Also those Chemical bonds of yours, Paul; I would hang on to them. They will go higher." He rested a hand on his nephew's shoulder, clipping out: "And for your distinguished service in the last war, Paul, I have seen to it that your rating in the Reserve Officers' Korps was tonight advanced to major. In case of war you will serve on my general staff. If I step beyond regulations to tell these developments, it is only because an extraordinary national emergency has arisen and I would save red tape. An aide will arrive within the hour to advise any further procedure. You will please be prepared for any exigency, and I suggest you retire at once for a few minutes' sleep." His hand snapped to his temple. "*Gute Nacht,* Major Emmerich."

Emergency! Staff appointment! Mechanically Paul Emmerich steeled himself to attention. The salute shadowed pallor in his face. "*Gute Nacht,* Herr General." Dumbly he saw his uncle go down the long room, bow himself out; heard the big car go roaring out of the drive.

His father's excited voice: "A major! *Mein Gott,* he has ranked our

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Paul a major. And prepare for active duty! It is the day, Paul! Your chance at last!"

Balduin Emmerich's eyes were blue fire in the lampshine. Paul listened without hearing his father's words; then walked silently from the library, following the sound of his mother's footsteps. He knew she would wait for him on the stairway landing; wait tight-lipped under the dim portraits of those unfriendly ancestors who looked down from the upper hall gallery like so many windowed ghosts. Great-grandfather Wasserman with his pitchfork whiskers and unforgiving eyes that had aimed the gun-sights with Blücher at Waterloo. Great-uncle Moritz who had died at Gravelotte. Stern old Grandfather Emmerich who had fallen before the cannon at Sedan. Uncle Wilhelm and Uncle Helmuth, grim-jawed, frowning, long-buried lieutenants under the muds of the Kameroon. And Wolff — the brother whose novel lay unfinished in the library desk and whose life lay unfinished, ashes somewhere beyond the Marne.

"PAUL." His mother's voice put a bur in his throat. Gently he caught and held her hand in the brown darkness.

"Paul—you will go?"

"You would not want it otherwise, Mother. The Fatherland—"

"I know." Her tone was leaden.

He said heavily, "One cannot put self above country, Mother."

"I am very tired, Paul. When the order comes for you, I will be in my room."

"*Nein,* do not take it so hard, *kleine Mutterchen.* They have only declared a national emergency. Surely the Esperench government will recall their rash move. We are not going to have this war."

"I will be waiting in my room, Paul."

"But, Mother—"

"When the order comes — you will stop at my door to say good-by?"

Dumbly he nodded. She released her fingers from his hand, stood on tiptoe to press her cheek against his, then moved silently through the upper hall dusk to her door.

Closing the door of his own room, jabbing angrily for the lamp-switch, Paul Emmerich stood white with clenched teeth while light blurred on his eyes and his lashes stung. A china clock on his bureau struck ding-ding-ding on a foolish little chime twelve times. He dragged a trembling wrist across his mouth, and watched the panel above the bureau where a tiny spider was valiantly pulling a mercurial thread between a Heidelberg rapier and the varnished splinter of an airplane propeller. Wolff's Fokker had burned at ten thousand—

Emmerich's hand dropped woodenly to his pocket, touched the weighty package under the cloth, galvanized. "*Gott steh uns bei—*"

Whipping about, he locked the door; then stepped to a tall window to throw the shutters wide. Below the window blue willows dreamed gracefully on the banks of the silver pond; the warm breeze stirred his hair with its midnight perfume, and dried the perspiration on his forehead. An oath muttered through his teeth as he dragged the folded newspaper from his coat, tore apart the printed sheets and unwrapped a long-barreled .38 army automatic.

"One cannot," the whisper lay deep in his throat, "put country above everything—"

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Gripping the .38 by the barrel, Paul Emmerich cocked back his arm, wound up slowly, let fly. The automatic sighed out of the window and made a black streak through the moonbeams. Soaring in a high, slow arc, the gun flip-flopped twice in mid air, went swish through the upper fronds of a willow, and lit in the center of the pond. A nocturnal splash. Water spouted, rippled, froze flat. A couple of bubbles floated to the surface to mark the spot where the gun was nosing into mud. Then the bubbles drifted away.

CHAPTER V.

DANGER OF WAR.

CONSTELLATIONS of a size and brilliance unusual to a night of rain cometed in bat-like orbits about the sky, and when the star-shower faded away, John Keats found himself coming conscious with the headache of a frontiersman who had just been scalped. Must have been lying in the alley here about fifteen minutes.

Keats saw a Reichswehr soldier standing over him.

"*Betrunken!* the soldier grunted. "Coming out of it, are you? And a nasty smash you have given yourself on the head for staggering into that wall. The little boy found you before I did, and ran to summon an ambulance. You foreigners! First it is that English boy crazy with liquor climbing a fire escape to the roof of the building next door—"

"A Britisher climbing to the roof?"

"All dressed up in a fine dinner coat, too, clambering around that dirty fire escape in the rear. Ordered him down in a hurry, I did, and he ran like a rabbit."

John Keats had no time for Reichswehr soldiers just then. Butting the surprised man out of the way, he charged into the hotel. His press card opened a channel up the police-fenced staircase, and he darted across the mezzanine to find the Royal Suite guarded by a stoic Reichswehr sentry.

"Press!" Keats rasped. "Has anyone gone into or come out of that bedroom where the newswriters are?"

"*Ja.* A Russian woman was in there for five or six minutes. After she came out a young Englishman from the London papers went through into the room. Several minutes later Herr Emmerich followed him. He came out. The Englishman is still there."

Keats stepped by the guard and entered the dim corridor, slipping the Colt from his hip pocket as he did. He entered the bedroom. It was unlighted, pitch dark. The bathroom door was closed, but a trickle of light came through the keyhole. That was it—Shepler was in the bathroom.

Stepping across the hall, Keats was suddenly attacked by a whirlwind. A knife slashed his finger, whacked the gun from his hand. Keats uppercutted blindly, heard the knife clatter to the floor as his fist landed. Claws raked the side of his face and he threw himself blindly forward. His shins banged on a wooden cot, tripping him into a hurly-burly of sheets and blankets. A blanket whipped over his face. Batting it away, Keats could grasp only empty blackness.

He found the table lamp, switched it on. The room was empty!

Springing to the bathroom door, Keats kicked it open, breaking the panel. On the floor, in a pool of blood, lay a man.

"Shepler!" Keats howled.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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Trespass

By JAMES M. CLARKE

As Bruce, the racketeer, whispered, "It's my biggest deal—but it's dynamite," little did Dixie realize he would set off the fuse

Long Novelette

CHAPTER I.

OUT-SMARTED.

IN this house in the old French Quarter of New Orleans, a countess had once entertained, but the high, luxurious rooms suited a gambling lay-out well enough. Tonight, the long green crap table was piled with enough currency to choke a bull calf. A dark-faced Greek who continually mopped the back of his neck with a silk handkerchief was thirty-thousand ahead and going strong. The other games stood idle; the croupier at the roulette wheel riffled silver dollars through his expert fingers; the blackjack dealer flipped out cards to a morose, lantern-jawed man who lost his money as if it were a disagreeable duty. Everybody else was watching the crap game.

But "Dixie" Bell sat half-hidden in a high-backed chair and scowled at his own face reflected in a tall mirror. Once he had been part of this life, but he did not belong any more. Down in the lower delta below New Orleans, he had a job night-nursing a

They came up struggling for the rifle

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diesel pump engine. He felt like a country boy in the city, and that was hard to take, for Dixie's life had been varied as a crazy quilt and he knew his way around. He had been a feather-weight fighter, a jockey and a sailor. He had run rum when rum-running was a good business. Though he stood only five feet two, the delta trappers and fishermen accounted him a man.

He looked at his finger nails stained by grease that would not scrub out. His clothes, none too good in the first place, showed signs of wear. Down in the Delta he looked all right—but here even the waiters wore expensive jewelry. At the crap table stood the big-shots of half a dozen dubious professions and high-rolling gamblers down for the racing season at Jefferson Park. While he worked through the long night for a few dollars they were betting thousands. And all the while, down in the Delta, Henry Marot was dazzling Dixie's girl, Anne, with his new car, his fancy clothes, his boxes of candy and his roll of bills.

Without shame, Dixie wished himself back in the rackets again. Henry Marot's money would be small change compared to what he could make. And it had been a lot of fun—the old life where he took a new chance every day and drew down a hatful of money at the end of the week. He wished the old days were back again, the days when he drove a car for Mr. Bruce.

A man came walking into the mirror beside Dixie's reflected face and paused to give his hat and stick to an attendant. Dixie started and turned. The man was below forty; tall, well-made and dressed in a way that made the gamblers look cheap. He looked like somebody respectable, and very successful. He was Mr. Bruce in person. Seeing Dixie he came across the marble floor and held out his hand. He had a long mouth and his smile was pleasant.

"Hello," he said. "Hello, Dixie."

Dixie jumped up and grinned, showing wide-spaced teeth. "Hello, Mr. Bruce."

Mr. Bruce looked him up and down with a friendly, appraising stare.

"It's been a long time since I saw you. You've grown up, Dixie. How are you getting along?"

"All right," Dixie said. "I can't kick, Mr. Bruce."

Dixie had questions to ask, and a lot to say to Mr. Bruce. But a bald-headed man in a blue silk shirt too tight around the collar came up and slapped Mr. Bruce on the shoulder.

"Well, well, well!" he said, grasping Mr. Bruce's hand. "Glad you got here, glad you got here!"

His teeth glistened with gold, his eyes glistened with good humor, and his oily skin glistened in the light. Though the man had done him no harm, Dixie took an instant dislike to him. He was too damn friendly. But Mr. Bruce evidently had business with him. He said: "Have we got time for a little gambling, Pete?"

They turned their backs and walked off. But after a few steps Mr. Bruce halted.

"Take care of yourself, Dixie."

Men turned from the crap table to speak to him. "Hi!" they said. "How's things, Mr. Bruce?"

Mr. Bruce did not say "Hi", or "Howdy," or "H'yeah." He said: "Hello, Marty. Hello, Robles." Dixie remembered that Mr. Bruce always said, "Hello," like that. He had a way of speaking that was different—not high-hat, but as unlike the talk of other men in the rackets as were his clothes.

THE high play went on in a sort of hush. Small games are noisy, but here there was no show of excitement except the tense bodies of the men and the curious, strained sound of their voices. In a place like this, with a big game going on, there was always more than excitement over money. Always there was a sense of danger—a feeling that a life was not worth more than a thousand dollar bill. Dixie kept on watching Mr. Bruce.

He was not surprised when the bald-headed man turned around—though it was unnatural to turn away from a game like this. Unconsciously, he had been waiting

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for the bald-head to make some suspicious move. Following the direction of his look, Dixie saw that he had caught the eye of the lone player at the blackjack table. The bald-headed man took the cigar from his mouth and made a swift downward gesture, scattering ashes on the floor. The blackjack player nodded slightly, and went on with his game. The bald-head turned back to the crap table.

No one beside Dixie had been watching when the signal passed. His distrust of the bald man strengthened. Though people said Mr. Bruce had retired, he must still have enemies. No Florida liquor runner of prohibition days had been so strong or so successful. Old jealousies and old quarrels would not be entirely forgotten. A waiter came by with a tray of empty glasses. Dixie jerked his head slightly, grinning at him. The waiter paused, answering Dixie's grin, as people usually did.

"Your friend just took a couple of grand, riding along with the Greek," he said. "Mr. Bruce is one guy I always like to see win."

Dixie nodded. "He's a good guy. I haven't seen him in five years, and he remembered my name."

"He shows up these loud-mouthed tinhorns," the waiter said. "It ain't exactly that he's smooth—but he can come into a joint and spend twice as much as anybody else and you'd never know he was putting out a dollar."

"Yeah. Listen, Oliver. Who's the bald-headed guy standing next to Mr. Bruce?"

The waiter shot a discreet look over his shoulder. "Name's Baranov. New York and Miami. He used to run a string of night clubs. Why?"

"I just wondered."

"When you're my age you'll quit wondering. It ain't safe."

Dixie did not even hear this excellent advice. A couple of years before he had shipped on a freighter that touched at New York, and there he had heard a story. A bootlegger, named Baranov had decided that Mr. Bruce was making too much money, so he collected some good, tough trigger-men and went down to run him out of Florida. But Mr. Bruce did not run. He out-thought and out-fought Baranov and sent him north feeling very lucky to be alive. Baranov was the kind to nurse a grudge. According to the New York gossips he had sworn to get Mr. Bruce if it took the rest of his life.

OLIVER, the waiter, brought a round of drinks to the crap table. Mr. Bruce sipped his, but the bald-headed man drained his glass at a gulp. He put his hand on Mr. Bruce's arm, turned him so that his back was to the room, and held him in talk. Dixie shifted his look to the blackjack table. The lone player threw down his hand as if disgusted, turned his back on the table and walked out, speaking to no one.

He had hardly disappeared when the bald-headed man again laid his hand on Mr. Bruce's arm. They went to the cashier's window. Perhaps Mr. Bruce had never heard of Baranov's vow to get even for his defeat in Florida. Plenty of people had made trouble for Mr. Bruce without doing themselves any good, and even a smart man could make the mistake of forgetting old enemies. While their backs were turned, Dixie followed the blackjack player out.

The narrow street was still as a churchyard. Gray, flat-fronted houses seemed asleep. Down at the corner a street light burned yellow and feebly, leaving the middle of the block dark except for the parking lights of a big car. Evidently, it was waiting for some patron of the gambling house, but Dixie did not think it was Mr. Bruce's car. Mr. Bruce liked to walk. He glanced into the car, but it was empty. Behind him he heard a slight sound as if shoeleather had scraped on stone. Someone was in a near doorway, watching. Dixie walked on until he heard a door bang and footsteps echoing in the quiet.

Coming back, he walked on his toes, making scarcely any sound. Mr. Bruce and the bald-headed man were dim figures coming toward him. He waited in deep shadow

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until they reached the car. A third man stepped down from the doorway and went up to Mr. Bruce. Dixie could not catch what he said, but this was the same man who had been playing blackjack upstairs. His side was pressed close to Mr. Bruce and he held his hand in his pocket. The bald-headed man opened the door of the car.

Dixie let his feet slap the sidewalk hard enough to wake the echoes. He staggered drunkenly toward them and bumped into the man next to Mr. Bruce.

"Excuse me, mister," Dixie said. "Could you give me a nickel for coffee?"

Even in the faint light, the snarling anger on the man's face was plain. So was the big automatic in his hand.

"Scram!" he said, "before I open your guts up."

Dixie grabbed his wrist with one hand and the gun with the other. The man swore and wrenched. He did not succeed in freeing himself, but he was strong. Dixie let go his wrist, locked his own arm under the man's arm and shoved down. The man grunted and his fist smacked into the side of Dixie's face.

Dixie fell clear across the sidewalk and brought up against an iron post. But he jumped up with the automatic in his hand. The blackjack player was lying on the sidewalk. Mr. Bruce stood with a gun poked into the bald-headed man's belly. He took a gun from under his arm and a bunch of keys from his pocket. He tossed the keys to Dixie.

"Get in and drive," he said.

Mr. Bruce made the bald-headed man get into the front seat. Then he loaded the blackjack player into the back and covered him with a lap robe. When Mr. Bruce got in, he was wiping his hands on a handkerchief. The stain of fresh blood showed in the lamp light.

"Drive to the ferry," said Mr. Bruce.

THEY crossed the ferry and drove along a paved highway into the country. The only time any one spoke was when Mr. Bruce told Dixie to turn off onto a road surfaced with crushed oyster shell. They came to a lonely and deserted stretch with high bushes growing on either side. Mr. Bruce reached down and cut the switch.

The bald-headed man started to blubber. He said he hadn't meant to do Mr. Bruce any harm. Mr. Bruce got out and told the bald-headed man to bring his partner.

The other man groaned, but he could stand now. Mr. Bruce stood close and spoke slowly.

"If I ever see either of you again, you won't live an hour. Do you understand? Keep out of my way."

Mr. Bruce did not raise his voice, but Dixie knew that he meant what he said, and so did the men. In the headlight glare they looked limp and whipped.

The car whirled down the road and Mr. Bruce lighted his pipe. Dixie saw that he was smiling around the stem. One eyebrow cocked up in a questioning way.

"That was a pretty decent thing you just did for me," he said. "Why did you do it, Dixie?"

"Why wouldn't I? Maybe you've forgotten what happened in Linda Vista, Florida."

Mr. Bruce's eyebrow came down, but he was still smiling.

"No," he said, "I haven't forgotten. But I'm a little surprised when people remember things like that. Sometimes they do—but not often enough for me to get used to it."

For a while they drove in silence. The lights of the crossroads filling station showed in the distance.

"Mr. Bruce," Dixie said, "why didn't you rub those guys out? They were trying to bump you off, and they're liable to try it again."

"No," Mr. Bruce said. "They won't bother me again. They're yellow. I never kill anybody unless I have to. Every killing comes back to you, one way or another. Besides, I'm avoiding trouble in New Orleans. It's bad for business."

"I heard," Dixie said, "that you'd retired."

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Mr. Bruce did not answer. The head- and took down the telephone receiver. Dixie slowed for the turn. It was like old times to have Mr. Bruce riding beside him, talking in his quiet, carrying voice.

" Turn in here."

Mr. Bruce went into the service station and took down the telephone receiver. Dixie lighted a cigarette and let his mind go back five years.

When he was an apprentice rider his stable went broke and left him stranded at Hialeah, the track outside Miami. He hitch-hiked as far as a place called Linda Vista and found work tending a big alcohol still. Mr. Bruce used to come around, on business. He always spoke to him with a friendly kind of politeness that Dixie appreciated. No one else paid him much attention. To them, he was just another young punk. Even so, with the light work and high pay, Dixie thought he was sitting on top of the world. At eighteen he still had a lot to learn.

His boss got into trouble; somebody reported him to the prohibition agents, and to save his other interests he had to let them raid the still. To make the raid look authentic somebody had to be left for the raiders to find. They left Dixie and it looked as if he was due for a year with the road gangs. But Mr. Bruce, looking like a prosperous real-estate operator, walked into the courtroom. He spoke to a few people and before Dixie knew that he had a friend he was paroled—in the custody of Mr. Bruce.

MR. BRUCE gave Dixie a job driving big cars loaded with imported liquor. He started from a dingy warehouse beside the Miami river and ended almost anywhere; sometimes in northern Alabama, or Tennessee, or even Oklahoma. It was hard work, and dangerous, but Dixie liked it. He also liked Mr. Bruce. Often Mr. Bruce rode with him and they talked together.

Mr. Bruce was smarter than anyone Dixie had known. He was well educated and still read a lot of books. He had been an officer in the A. E. F. Some people said he had come home to find his business wiped out and his wife had run away.

One black, rainy night when they had been talking about the liquor business, Mr. Bruce said: " Do you know what organized crime means, Dixie? Put it this way: If a man smuggles in a few bottles of liquor it's wrong, but it doesn't mean much. That's individual crime. But suppose he smuggles in a thousand cases? He has to have help—organization. That means double-crossing and bribery and plenty of killing. It means that men are forced into doing things they hate to do. It's worse than a war. There's nothing good you can say about organized crime!"

Fresh in Dixie's mind was the impression of what had happened to some hijackers who stopped one of Mr. Bruce's cars. So he remembered.

Mr. Bruce was smiling around his pipe stem when he came out of the service station. Life seemed to amuse him a lot.

" This car was stolen this afternoon," he said. " I told the police I'd leave it on St. Peter street."

They crossed the river again, left the car, and walked through the French Quarter to a quiet restaurant. A pretty waitress fluttered around the table and called Mr. Bruce by name. The ladies still liked Mr. Bruce.

But as he studied him across the table, Dixie saw that there had been a change. New wrinkles had come, and they made his face less pleasant. His skin was a little puffy beneath the eyes. But the eyes had changed more than anything. Mr. Bruce's eyes were very dark blue and they had always seemed strange—as if they did not match the rest of his face. His eyes never smiled. Now, they looked stranger than ever.

Mr. Bruce ordered a bottle of brandy and drank half of it before their omelettes came. The waitress fluttered around their table while they ate. But when the coffee came, Mr. Bruce hinted politely that they would rather be alone. The girl went off pouting.

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"She's pretty," Mr. Bruce said. "Too pretty. You get tired of looking at a face like hers. Really beautiful women don't have perfect faces. Their noses are too big, or their eyes are too small or their mouths are too long. Some feature is always a little off."

DIXIE thought of Anne Marot. She was pretty—but he often teased her about her big French nose. He grinned.

"What are you doing now?" Mr. Bruce asked abruptly.

"Tending a diesel in a pumping lant."

"Do you like it?"

"It's not too good," Dixie said. "I don't make but twenty-five a week, and it gets tiresome."

"Do you know anything about boats?"

"How big?"

"Fifty-six feet. She has a diesel for cruising and two high-speed gas engines for getting out of the way."

"I can handle a boat like that."

"You're a pretty good hand with an engine," Mr. Bruce said. He poured himself a stiff drink and while he drank it his blue eyes surveyed the room around him without seeming to do so. No one was near.

"You're pretty good with an engine, and I can count on you. I'll tell you something. Not much—" Mr. Bruce smiled—"but something. I'm back in the business. Not liquor. It's my biggest deal. But it's dynamite—very, very hot stuff. You should know that. I pay my men well. I'll give you three hundred dollars a week—to handle boats."

Mr. Bruce looked across at him. Dixie lowered his eyes and made marks on the tablecloth.

"Do I work in New Orleans or away?"

"Not far away. You've got a woman on your mind, haven't you?"

None of Dixie's attachments to women had been like his feeling for Anne Marot. She meant too much for him to talk about her lightly.

"Yes," he said, and hoped Mr. Bruce would not start kidding.

"You'll be close enough to her," he said. "And you'll have plenty of time off. I'm the only one that has to stand the gaff for very long."

Mr. Bruce's eyes were so dark, now, that they seemed almost black. Dixie looked down at the table cloth and made new marks; a map of the lower Mississippi where it made a big bend. On the right-hand bank was a long, thin community of houses set in orange groves. At this hour the trappers would be well on their way to the great salt marsh below. Roosters would be crowing and the lonely women stirring in their beds. In a little while, the easy, pleasant life of the delta would begin. Dixie raised his eyes.

"Can't do it," he said. "Thanks, Mr. Bruce."

Mr. Bruce looked at him hard. "Are you yellow?"

Dixie's hands clenched on the table cloth. It always made him mad to have anyone suggest that he was afraid.

"You know damn well I'm not!"

Mr. Bruce smiled and Dixie calmed down right away. "I know you're not yellow. But I don't quite make you out, Dixie. What's the matter with my proposition?"

"Nothing," Dixie said. He felt that he was making a fool of himself, but he felt stubborn, too. "I—I just don't want any part of it."

MR. BRUCE studied him. "I want you," he said. "I'll raise you to three fifty a week. That's a whole lot of money for a kid your age. You could have a lot of fun—and your girl wouldn't exactly hate you for spending a few dollars on her. Put the two things up together and look at them straight. You're nursing a diesel engine for twenty-five a week—just making enough to get by. I'm offering you more than you'll ever make in your life.

"And it's an easy job. Just running a boat off and on, and no shooting unless bad trouble comes up. I'm not hiring you to kill anybody."

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Dixie added the levee to his map. There was a road on top the levee. It ran past Len Hammer's combination post office and store, on down past the Sardu's meat house and the old dance hall till it reached the big clump of trees beside the Marot's place.

But he could go back and visit if he took Mr. Bruce's job. It wasn't as if he would have to leave. Dixie did not know what was the matter with him. He was being offered the money and the excitement he had been wishing for. With three hundred and fifty dollars a week to spend he could give Anne twice—three times—as much as her cousin Henry; and there was not anything wrong with what Mr. Bruce wanted. Nothing was wrong—but Dixie could not say "yes." Mr. Bruce expected an answer.

"I'd like to work for you, Mr. Bruce, but I can't do it."

Mr. Bruce looked at Dixie, took a drink, and looked at him again.

"I think you're crazy," he said. "But maybe I'm the one that's crazy. We can't either of us help how we feel or act. I've been in the rackets too long to get out. You've been a good boy too long to get in. Who does that make the sucker, anyhow?"

He took another drink and rose, holding out his hand.

"Take care of yourself, Dixie."

CHAPTER II.

DEATH TO A TRESPASSER.

DIXIE caught the mail-boat at five o'clock that morning. He was sour and refused to talk even to Vic, the cook—and Vic was a good friend. Mr. Bruce's proposition was still on Dixie's mind. So were Henry Marot and Anne. By the light of day it seemed to him that he had been a bigger fool than ever before in his life.

But after a while he went to sleep and slept until the cook awoke him.

"You want to ride down to Pilot Town, Dixie?"

Dixie was enough himself to grin. The settlement where he lived was the jumping off place. Below was nothing but marsh and swamp until one came to the barracks where the pilots waited incoming boats at the very last point of land.

On deck the chill river wind slashed at Dixie's face. He braced himself and looked out over the grey sweep of water. There were many boats in the river; trapper's launches, shrimp trawlers and oyster boats. It seemed as if the whole settlement had decided to cross over. The mail boat swung toward the landing in front of Len Hammer's, hooting for clearance. She passed close to a shrimp trawler belonging to the Corbeau family. On her forward deck stood a priest, conspicuous because of his collar and sombre clothes. Beside the Corbeau family, Dixie recognized Anne Marot, her father and brother and her cousin Henry. On the after deck was a coffin, an ugly box of pine, shining with varnish. The people on the boat waved somberly. The mail-boat captain leaned from the pilot house to shout. "Who's dead?"

The answer came faintly, for the trawler had passed: "Charley Corbeau."

Charley Corbeau was a young fellow, not much above Dixie's age. He was a friend of Dixie's—and a special friend of Anne's brother, Paul Marot. They had adjoining trap lines and often worked them together. Dixie jumped to the wharf before the mail boat touched, and ran down a ladder to a speedboat where Len Hammer was fussing with a cold engine. Len cursed, for he was violent about everything.

"See if you can get this triple-distilled, seven-star, hundred-proof, piece of junk to start, will you?"

He swore again when Dixie asked what had happened to Charley Corbeau.

"He got shot, the damn monkey! He ran his trap line over on duck-club land and a guard shot him with a rifle. I told them those fellows weren't fooling when they said to keep out, but nobody'd believe me."

On the farther shore they followed the crowd up the levee to the little cemetery. Ten days before a letter had come, ad-

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dressed to the postmaster, but meant for the trappers and hunters of the whole community. It said that, since there was no police protection, the Mississippi Gun Club would protect its land from trespassers by force. It said that the trappers had paid no attention to the posted warnings so far, but they had better do so in the future. It was signed by a name nobody could read, but the man—whoever he might be—was secretary, of the gun club. Len Hammer alone had taken the warning seriously.

The cemetery was on a slight rise just back of the levee. Family crypts like small houses stood up in mournful rows. The low grey sky pressed down over the treeless land and gulls cried as they circled overhead. Len and Dixie walked between the tombs and stood in the circle about the Corbeau vault.

The people were very silent, and there was not one of the dark, intense faces that did not show sorrow. Most of them were of French descent; even their English speech was tinged by a French accent. And their feelings were violent and quick-flaring as those of the men and women who stormed the Bastile during the French Revolution. Now they were grieving for young Charley Corbeau—and they were angry, too.

The priest raised a little book and began to read the service. Dixie watched the Marots. The father, old Jean, was gnarled and bent and tough as a cypress knee. His wife was a lean, dark woman with a hawk nose and a grim mouth. She was kind, under the surface, but her tongue could lash and her mind was very practical. Anne and her brother, Paul, had inherited more of their father's easy-going and sunny nature. But Dixie well knew what strength lay beneath their charming ways.

BOTH were weeping while the priest's voice droned on, consigning Charley Corbeau to the care of God. But Anne's eyes flashed and when he looked at Paul Marot, Dixie thought that he would not like to be the man who had shot his friend. Paul looked awkward, but he was not. And he stood nearly as tall as Big Michel Marceau.

Paul was a good shot, too. But Henry Marot was better. Henry's father was dead, and he was more or less like a son to Jean Marot and his wife though he did not live with them. The old lady was very fond of him. Dixie did not know just how fond of him Anne was. Henry's body was well-made; his lean, dark face, handsome.

Men raised the pine box and shoved it into the open vault. The priest prayed while the people knelt. Then a mason began sealing the tomb up again.

Men gathered around Len Hammer to wave their arms and speak their minds loudly. What did these rich men at the gun club think? That the life of a duck was worth the life of a man? Did they think they could come into good trapping land and keep honest men from making an honest living? They would see, by hell! They would see that delta men could shoot just as well as their guards, yes! Big Michel Marceau nearly knocked a man down with the force and sweep of his gestures.

Len Hammer, violent as he was, had a shrewd, practical wisdom which had brought him plenty of money and a commanding position in the community. "All right," he said, "keep on trapping gun club land and see what happens! They'll kill you just like they killed Charley. Shoot back and you'll get hung. That's the law."

The trappers argued that it was neither right nor just to keep them off land they had always trapped over. The rich men of the club did not want the muskrat fur, and just because a trapper might shoot an occasional bird was no reason to shoot him.

"No," Len Hammer said, "it ain't right. But what the hell has that got to do with the law? They own the land and they can shoot anybody that trespasses."

Dixie listened without speaking—which was one of the things an education of hard knocks had taught him to do. He had heard this same argument about posted land before. It was a sore point with the

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trappers. A number of years before a group of wealthy men from the north had quietly bought up a huge tract of marsh land. They built an expensive club house where a man could stay in luxury and go out to shoot when he chose. But when they posted the land, trouble started.

The river had built the land, some of it during the memory of people yet living. It was marsh and swamp—good only for trapping and hunting. The people of the lower river had considered it theirs because they lived near and used it, but they had never thought of taking title. It enraged them to have it taken from them. There had been a bitter struggle when the no-trespass signs first went up. Delta families were involved, for the club employed local guides. Several men were killed. Finally, the trappers left the land alone, acknowledging themselves beaten by the power of money. But they were bitter.

WHEN hard times forced the wealthy men to abandon the club, the delta said it served them right and went back to trapping. For several years they took muskrats on the land unmolested. Then, a few weeks before Charley Corbeau was shot, new men took the club over. And instead of remembering their previous defeat the trappers prepared to fight again. The land, they said, was rightfully theirs and they were not the kind to submit tamely. They ran their trap lines just as before. Now Charley Corbeau was dead; first blood to the club. The delta men had an injury to avenge.

Dixie saw Anne looking at him in a certain way. She made a little motion with her head and moved away from her mother who was too busy talking to notice. Her face was tear-stained, but her eyes were neither angry nor sad when she looked into Dixie's. When Anne looked at him he felt very queer and light-headed.

"You were gone a long time," she said. "I was afraid you would not come back, you."

Dixie and Anne were in the habit of teasing each other, trying playfully to hurt. That was their way of showing that they liked each other.

"Why?" Dixie said.

But today Anne was not playing the game. Her black eyes looked at him very straight and questioningly.

"My mother is always say—' He is foreigner—that Dixie Bell. He don't know how to stay in the place he is put, or why would he be here instead of in the place where his papa live? One day he will run off and we will not see him no more.' So I was afraid she was right."

"I guess," Dixie said, still playing—"I guess it would have broken your heart if I hadn't come back?"

Another day Anne would have scornfully said that he could go and drown himself for all she cared. But she only kept looking straight at him. She was a small but sturdily built girl who would develop into a matronly, capable woman. Now her beauty was at its first flowering. She would never be lovelier, and Dixie felt his heart hammer at his ribs when Anne reached out and put her hand on his arm.

"I want for talk with you again, Dixie, before—" She looked swiftly around to see if her mother was noticing. "Will you come tonight?"

A sudden thought stopped the "yes" that was on Dixie's tongue. "Will Henry be there?"

Anne frowned, dropped her eyes and nodded.

"Then I won't come."

Anne put her hand on his arm again. "I can get out for a minute," she said. "I will come outside. I want for see you, Dixie."

She turned quickly to join her mother who was scowling grimly at them both. Dixie did not care to meet the old lady's eagle eye. He started away to rejoin Len Hammer. But when he turned he saw Henry Marot looking at him. Henry had stood nearby and watched him talking to Anne. He was angry. He came forward swiftly and stood in Dixie's way.

"Anne is my girl, her!"

Dixie was surprised at the quivering

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anger in Henry's voice. He felt his own neck begin to grow hot. "Since when?" he asked.

"She is my girl!" Henry repeated. "I don't want to see you talk to her any more."

Dixie looked up into Henry Marot's face and leisurely scratched a match on his thumb nail. The nostrils of Henry's thin nose were pinched in. His narrow-set dark eyes were hot and his small mouth worked a little.

"And if you see me talking to her," he said, "what are you going to do about it?"

"You will find out, you! I will show you what will happen!"

Dixie moved a little closer. "Listen," he said. "You're not married to Anne and you've got to be a whole lot tougher than you are to keep me from seeing her. Any time you want to fight it out, just say the word."

Before, Henry had looked straight at Dixie. Now he was angrier than ever, but his hot eyes moved away. They looked to one side, then the other. He brought them back to Dixie with an effort.

"You will see what I can do!"

Dixie suddenly grinned. "I'll be around to the Marot's tonight," he said, and turned his back.

CHAPTER III.

SHOOT FIRST!

DIXIE walked down the winding levee road expecting a fight. He did not believe that Henry Marot enjoyed the prospect; he had not had the look of a man who wants to fight. Dixie, himself, felt just fine. There were times when a good fight was the most satisfying thing in the world, and it would be a great pleasure to muss up Henry's face. He did not like Henry's face, nor the clothes he wore, nor the way he talked. In fact, he did not like anything about Henry.

Paul was sitting on the back porch whittling with a long-bladed trapper's knife. He grunted a greeting and Dixie sat down. He could hear the murmur of voices in the kitchen behind, but the deep tones were old Jean Marot's.

"Where's Henry?"

Paul Marot grunted again. "He went away right after supper to work on his boat. That new engine is too strong and she is leak around the stuffing box. What he is want with so much power I don't know, me."

The door opened softly, closed, and Anne stood beside them. Dixie jumped up. Paul rose more slowly. He spoke to his sister in French. She slapped him, and Paul went inside, chuckling. Dixie and Anne moved down the steps and out into the orange grove. The strong river wind shook the trees above their heads but did not touch them. Long grass caught at their feet. At first they walked a little apart, neither speaking. Dixie could hardly see Anne. But he knew she was there as surely as he knew that he was there himself. He could feel the presence of Anne all through him. Their hands touched. They touched again, and clung.

"Dixie," Anne said, "they say I have got to marry Henry."

Dixie felt as if some unseen fist had hit him in the belly.

"Who says so?"

"My mama and papa. He wants for marry me next summer, and they say I have got to marry him."

Dixie wanted to ask a question, but found it hard. He was afraid of the answer.

"Do you want to marry him?"

"No, Dixie! I don't like Henry, me. Since I was a little girl I have hate him. But mama likes him and he is nephew to my papa. They say he will be a good husband because he is make more money than any trapper."

"But you don't have to marry him," Dixie said. "Just because they want you to is no sign you have to marry a man you don't like."

Anne sighed. "I have said I will not, but I will have to. What your mama and papa say is what you have to do."

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Dixie had lived among these folk long enough to know that her parents' word was a delta girl's law. There was no use in arguing. He said: "Is that why you wanted to see me? To tell me about this?"

They had stopped walking and stood face to face. "Yes, that is why. I have not yet promise myself to Henry, Dixie—"

The first kiss was short and cool. Then they clung to each other. Dixie had never felt like this before. He did not know where he was or how long he stood there.

The carrying sound of Anne's mother's voice tore them apart as if they had been seized by the shoulders. Anne caught her breath with a gasp that was almost a sob. They hurried through the trees, half running toward the lighted doorway where Anne's mother waited. She caught Anne by the arm, jerked her inside, glared at Dixie and slammed the door.

Paul came out and laid a hand on Dixie's shoulder. They walked around the house and up on to the levee. A downward-bound boat was going by. A door from her fire-room was open and she cast a moving red shine out on to the current. Dixie wished he were aboard her. He wished he were working for Mr. Bruce and making more money than Henry Marot. He wished he had Henry here on the open levee instead of Paul.

"This is too bad," Paul said. "I am sorry, Dixie. I do not like to see Anne marry with Henry. But our mother has make up her mind, and what can we do?"

"But he's yellow!" Dixie said. "He told me to keep away from her and I told him to try and make me. I told him I'd be here tonight and he was too yellow to stay to fight it out."

PAUL MAROT nodded. "Yes, Henry is coward, him. Not many people know that, but I have know a long time. Henry hate me very bad because I know, and because of other things. It is bad to have your sister marry with a man who hate you."

"What about your father? Does he like Henry?"

"Sometimes he don't like the way Henry does, but Henry is son of his brother. He belongs to our blood, and so my father is think he must be all right after all. He would not make Anne marry him, though. It is our mama. Henry is doing good, and mama would rather make ten cents than have a good time, her."

Paul's heavy shoes crunched the oyster shell, but Dixie's light step made little sound. The river pulled and sucked at driftwood along the shore. Dixie picked out a light on the farther side. They were just opposite the cemetery.

"It's too damn bad," he said, "that the gun club guards didn't shoot Henry instead of Charley Corbeau."

"They have done murder, that is what they have do! What was the hurt of Charley trapping a few rat? We have always trap rat in the prairie, back to the time of our grandfather. It is right we should trap there—more right than for them to hunt. They do not live by hunt, those rich men."

"It's a funny thing," Dixie said, "that nobody's ever seen one of their guards."

"He would get shot quick if we did see him. But all we see is some airplanes going by. It is not like before. Some men from here were guides, then and it made a trouble we don't have this time. There are men that would work for the club and be traitor to us, but the club has not ask. We have not see one man from the club—not one rich man, nor one poor man who works. It is a funny thing, like you say."

They had turned back. There was no sound except Paul's feet crunching the shell and the ceaseless talk of the river. Bad things were happening to everybody; to Dixie, himself, to Charley Corbeau, to Paul, to Anne. Dixie felt depressed, and when he felt depressed he wanted to go somewhere or fight somebody, or both. It was the only cure he knew. He said: "You've got some traps on club land, too, haven't you?"

"Half of my string is there—half outside. I am going to trap on the prairie all season, and if I see some stranger I will

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shoot him first and talk with him after, yes. At three in the morning I start, and I have already clean my rifle."

"I think I'll come along," Dixie said. "I'll take a shotgun and try for some geese. A load of number five shot in the belly might teach these guards something, too."

CHAPTER IV.

ALMOST CORNERED.

THE long winter night still covered everything when they reached Paul's camp on the edge of the "prairie." It was cold and raw and lonely. Trapping in the great salt marsh that fringes the gulf of Mexico is no work for delicate men. Paul made coffee and opened a box of hard biscuits. Breakfast would be later, at nine or ten o'clock.

On the bayou bank beside the brush shelter two pirogues were drawn up. Paul got into one and pushed off, calling back to wish Dixie luck and to tell him to watch out for the guards. Dixie grinned into the darkness which quickly swallowed his friend. He was not going to hunt either geese or guides; he was going down to the duck club itself. A hard and none too virtuous life had made Dixie cynical, and it seemed odd to him that none of the club people had ever shown themselves.

Paul had left him a hunting pirogue—twelve feet of hollowed log narrower than Dixie's own shoulders. The thing quivered and shipped cold water as he got in—for Dixie was not so expert as the delta men and a pirogue is tricky as a bicycle on a wire. But once settled in the stern, Dixie managed the craft well enough. Earlier than he expected—long before the sky had begun to pale—his pirogue shot out into the quiet waters of a small lake. What he saw made Dixie feather his paddle and swing broadside to check his way. In this dead hour, the gun club lights flared against the dark. A string of bulbs ran down the length of the wharf. Flood lights in front of the buildings threw long shafts out on to the lake.

Dixie's eyes puckered up with thought. Old man Sardu had once trapped over the land where the club stood. He said that a pirogue could come within a hundred yards of it at the rear. It was yet night when Dixie left the dugout, took his shotgun and started across the treacherous marsh on foot. Ahead, tall trees were silhouetted against the gun club lights. The rasp of a match came to him plainly out of the silence. Up on the higher ground where the trees stood he saw the tiny flame and had a momentary glimpse of a man's face. Dixie moved to the left, away from the unsuspecting guard.

The club buildings looked huge. They were set on six-foot pilings but the ground floor had been screened. Part of this basement was lighted and two negroes in cook's aprons were working over a stove. In the living quarters above a window showed yellow, and over on the left one of two smaller buildings was lighted also. The glow from its open door showed the shadowy form of a big seaplane anchored in the lake. Slipping down from the trees Dixie put his eye to a crack and saw another seaplane, small and graceful as an aluminum swallow.

Two mechanics were hard at work on her engine.

The other building seemed to be a boathouse Dixie walked a dozen steps toward it and stopped his breath sticking in his throat. He could not run. He was too close to the voice which had startled him. Another voice answered and still another chimed in. The voices did not seem startled, or even disturbed, and the words were not English. They were hissing, cackling sounds. A lot of people seemed to be sleeping out here on the damp ground. He grinned suddenly. These queer sounds were Japanese, and Dixie Bell knew a great deal more than he had known a moment ago. Why would a lot of Japanese be sleeping out here in the swamp? Because they were being smuggled into the United States—and that was now the business of the Mississippi Gun Club.

Dixie quietly retreated and went down

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to the water's edge. The anchored seaplane was a cabin ship built to carry twelve or fifteen. A small launch and a skiff were tied to the wharf. Directly in front of the club the spidery shape of a machine gun stood out hard and clear in the light.

Still, Dixie had not seen enough. He knew a good many men on the wrong side of the law; some personally, more by sight. He thought he might find out who was running this business. So he went back to the trees and slipped along in the deep shadow. The guard behind him was singing a lonesome blues. Frogs croaked out in the marsh. The cooks rattled pans in the kitchen.

It was all very peaceful—even to the click of poker chips coming down from the lighted window of the club.

AT the corner stood a big cistern to catch the flow from the roof—for the bayou water would not do for drinking. Dixie leaned his gun against a post and climbed to the platform. He could have touched the screen and it gave him a queer feeling to be so close to the men in the room and still unknown to them. Not one of the seven would have appeared a criminal to a person riding beside him in a street car.

But four wore guns as if they were part of their clothing—articles which they never went without. Another had laid his automatic in front of him on the table. Dixie recognized this man; a lean young fellow with close-clipped carrot-colored hair. The players called him "Red." His last name was Hanford and his picture was on the bulletin board in Len Hammer's store. "Wanted for Robbing the U. S. Mails," the notice read, and gave his description. Red Hanford also robbed banks and helped his friends break jail. Another man had a white crown of bandages on his head. His smooth, heavy face looked slightly familiar to Dixie, but he could not place him. It did not matter. Since Red Hanford was here he knew that this was more than a way-station for smuggled aliens; it must also be a hide-away for badly wanted men—a refuge for those who were too "hot" to work at their trade.

Looking about him, Dixie saw that he had already been here too long. Trees he had not seen before were faintly visible. He climbed down and reached for his gun. But his groping hand did not find it and he remembered that he had left it against another post. A screen door banged behind him.

"Hey, Mac!"

Dixie stood fast, knowing that he could not be seen unless he moved. Getting no answer the man would go away. But the response came from beyond the trees—from the guard Dixie had first seen.

"What do you want?"

Behind him, Dixie heard startled cursing. "For cripes' sake!" the man said. "Hey, you!"

The man had started toward him and there was no time for Dixie to get his gun. The only clear way was to the left. As he ran, a gun crashed and the bullet sang close to his ear. People started yelling. Dixie spurted toward the trees, but Mac, the guard, was too fast on his feet. He fired from in front and Dixie saw that he was headed off. He doubled like a rabbit in front of a dog pack and gained the shelter of the hangar. Voices sounded within.

"Get your gun!" a man said. "If there's blasting they might need us."

A second man swore in a bored, irritated tone of voice. "What do you do with a gun?"

They were no sooner gone from the hangar than Dixie ducked in from the other side. The place was light as a meeting hall and bare except for machinist's gear and the little plane. There was no place to hide at all and very near him men were shouting back and forth, cursing, asking questions. Two by four rafters ran across under the roof.

Jumping on to a bench he swung himself up, worked his way over to a center support and perched there.

The man who stepped through the door had an automatic in his hand and so did the

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man who followed him. One looked under the bench while the other peered into the little plane. All the while Dixie sat on a rafter feeling naked as a jay. He could not have been more conspicuous. But one of the men said:

"He ain't here. A louse couldn't hide in here."

The other nodded. Dixie could easily have spat on him from where he sat.

"If you ask me," said the man, "I'd say there wasn't anybody around tonight. No Cajun is going to come sneaking around here. They ain't going to ask for any more of what we gave that trapper day before yesterday. And no dick is going to come down here, either."

They went out, still talking. Sounds of searching drifted away and grew quieter. Dixie grinned, swinging his legs down. But he drew them up again instantly. The mechanics walked in. They did not look around, but fell to work instantly. Watching them, Dixie almost forgot where he was. He liked engines, and this one was a honey. He was startled when a half dozen more men walked into the hangar.

Five of them were the poker players—including Red Hanford and the man with the bandaged head. The sixth seemed to be the pilot.

He spoke to the older of the mechanics and climbed into the plane.

The man with the bandaged head was shaking hands all around. The others wished him luck.

"Look out for them Havana frails," one said. "They took me for five grand when I was over there."

The bandaged man was grinning when he climbed in and Dixie suddenly remembered a day at the race track when this same face had looked in at the door of a stall where he was helping to rub down a horse.

"That's Dick Turner," the trainer had said. "He rubbed out a friend of mine in Detroit last winter. You don't see his name in the papers—but he's bad news."

Lately, Dick Turner had made the front pages by shooting his way out of a Texas prison. The little plane taxied out into the lake and roared skyward, Havana bound.

CHAPTER V.

BRUCE'S GAMBLE.

THE older mechanic seemed to be the boss. While the other put things away he began collecting tools in a bag.

"Snap out of it," he said. "We've got an hour's work on the big ship before Walker can leave with the Japs."

They were going away. Dixie eased himself on the rafter, getting ready to swing down. But the older man picked up a padlock. The other said, as if surprised:

"You going to lock this up?"

"I am if I'm in my right mind. Think I want these gorillas monkeying around my shop? They don't even know what makes a gun go off!"

He slid the door almost shut and waited for the other to go out. There was no telling when the door would be opened again, and the lake water was undrinkable. There was only one thing to do.

Dixie hit the floor. The younger man turned as if a gun had gone off at his back. He was pale and shaking. But the other kept right on chewing his wad of gum while he drew a pistol and pointed it at Dixie's chest.

"What are you doing in here?" he said, as if the only thing that annoyed him was finding a stranger in his shop. Dixie had known a lot of crabbed mechanics.

"Visiting," he said, and grinned.

The other man had recovered from his scare. "You going to bump him off, Harry?"

The mechanic lowered the gun a little and spat out his wad of gum. "Not me. I'm hired to manicure engines. There's plenty of guys around here that get paid for rubbing out. I'm going to take him to the boss. Go on out to the big ship, Ralph."

Finding no weapon on Dixie he put his own gun away. The sun was rising behind clouds. Trees and marsh and lake were

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grey in the grey dawn. Everything was still, not a soul stirring about the club. Dixie wondered about the "boss." It would take a smart man to think up this scheme. He must also be hard; the only way to make a man like Red Hanford shoot square with you was to be just as tough as he.

The club was narrow, built around three sides of a courtyard which was open toward the lake. There was a fish pond in the court and goldfish were actually swimming in it. The mechanics walked Dixie through a fifty-foot living room with walls paneled in gleaming oak. He knocked at a door at the far end of the room. A voice said, "Come in." The mechanic opened the door and shoved Dixie ahead of him.

Dixie stopped dead still and stared. Behind a mahogany desk sat Mr. Bruce. He studied Dixie with his unsmiling blue eyes. There was another man in the room, but Dixie hardly saw him. He kept staring at Mr. Bruce while the mechanic pushed him forward. The mechanic started to say something, but Mr. Bruce suddenly smiled.

"So you finally got here, Dixie?"

Dixie did not understand Mr. Bruce. But the thing to do was play up. He managed to grin.

"Yeah," he said. "I got here—and what a hell of a time I had finding the place!"

The mechanic said nothing. He was peeling the pink paper off a stick of gum. Mr. Bruce glanced at the man beside the desk. He was very dark—perhaps an Italian—and he gave off a faint breath of perfume.

Through an open window drifted the sound of a motor; a gas engine, Dixie's ear told him, on a boat. Mr. Bruce glanced out, then turned to the man.

"Legaspi," he said, "I'm going to be busy for a few minutes. But you can count the Japs off the *Thelma* just as well as I can. I'll be out after a while."

THE man looked at Dixie and turned back to Mr. Bruce, frowning. He did not want to go. Mr. Bruce did not say anything. He sat looking at the man and the man began to fidget. He rose hastily.

"Aw right, Mr. Bruce! I'm going, Mr. Bruce!"

There was a faint smile on the mechanic's face when the door closed. "Harry," Mr. Bruce said, nodding toward Dixie, "Did you find him?"

The mechanic nodded. "He was in the hangar. Dropped down right at our feet when we were locking up. He was up on the rafters all the time."

"Might be a good idea for you and Ralph to keep your mouths shut, Harry."

The mechanic nodded vigorously. "Whatever you say, Mr. Bruce."

The door shut behind him and Mr. Bruce told Dixie to sit down. He studied Mr. Bruce, wondering just why he acted the way he did. Mr. Bruce was not smiling at all, now.

"Dixie," he said, "what are you doing down here? If Legaspi thought I hadn't been expecting you he'd have shot you without getting out of his chair. He's nervous, and he doesn't take any chances in this Jap-running racket of his. If you followed me down here hunting the job I offered you, you're a damn fool. But I hope you did. Now, what's the idea?"

This looked like the best luck he could have had. All he had to do was say that he had come for a job and he could get out of his jam. But if he said he had come to get a job, he would have to take one. And Dixie did not want a job down here. He took a deep breath.

"I didn't come for a job, Mr. Bruce. I didn't even know you were here."

"Then what in hell are you doing here?"

"I came duck hunting with a friend of mine—a Cajun from up the river. I got lost early this morning, and when I saw the lights here at the club I came over. Somebody took a shot at me, so I hid out in the hangar."

"You picked a hell of a place to come to. Were you in the hangar when the plane left?"

Dixie nodded. Mr. Bruce's blue eyes looked at him a long time while thoughts

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worked behind his pale brow etched with fine wrinkles.

"You know too much," he said. "I've got to be sure you don't talk, and the best way to be sure that a man doesn't talk is to kill him. But there's another way to shut your mouth. I'll give you that job, even if you didn't come after it."

Dixie could not look into Mr. Bruce's eyes and think straight. He looked down and rubbed the calloused ball of his thumb along the smooth hard wood. Mr. Bruce was a swell guy. He was giving him a break. But if he didn't take the job Mr. Bruce would shoot him. He was like that, too. He had to take the job to save his life. But he would be working for Mr. Bruce if he took it, and the delta people were going to fight. He would have to go against them—or else let Mr. Bruce down. Either way, he would be going back on his friends.

"Can't do it, Mr. Bruce."

"Are you crazy?"

"Maybe. But I can't work for you, anyhow."

"Why not?"

"I dont want to, that's all."

MR. BRUCE sat back in his chair and looked thoughtfully at him. Out the window, Dixie could see a big cruiser tied up to the wharf. Small, brown Japanese men were coming off her. He counted seven. Mr. Bruce said suddenly:

"If you were a stool-pigeon you'd have jumped at the chance to get a job here. You're straight, but you're being a fool, Dixie. I admire guts in a man—but there's such a thing as carrying a principle too far. People used to let themselves be burned alive because they wouldn't do what they were told. It's all very noble but it doesn't do anybody any good. You'll be a lot happier making three fifty a week than lying in your grave."

Dixie's mouth was set hard. He could feel the muscles of his face ache.

"Can't do it, Mr. Bruce."

Mr. Bruce said no more. He reached into the drawer and took out a blue automatic. He held it loosely in his hand, waiting for Dixie to speak. When Dixie said nothing he pointed the gun at his heart. Mr. Bruce would not miss at four feet. Dixie looked away from the gun and held his eyes on Mr. Bruce's face. It was easier that way. Mr. Bruce was still waiting. Every little while, his face twitched very slightly, as if he were counting. Then his face was still and his eyes shifted to the pistol.

But he was not ready to shoot yet. He looked at Dixie's face again and dropped his eyes to the desk. His long mouth twisted.

"I make plenty of money," he said. "I can buy anything it takes to have a good time. But this is a tough way to make a living."

Once more his eyes narrowed to sight along the pistol. Dixie watched his face because he did not want to see Mr. Bruce's finger tighten on the trigger. He did not want to break down, and he felt like breaking down. Voices carried to him from the landing. Mr. Bruce looked very tired.

He began to swear softly under his breath.

"I don't have to do this," he said, as if to himself. "I've taken chances for a lot worse reasons. I'm going to gamble on how well you can keep your mouth shut, Dixie."

Mr. Bruce laid the pistol down on the desk. Dixie got to his feet and was surprised to find that he could hardly stand. He put his left hand on the chair back and reached out his right toward Mr. Bruce.

"You're white," he said.

Mr. Bruce got up and shook hands. "No," he said. "I'm a sentimentalist. Know what that is? It's a man who lets his feelings get the better of his judgment."

CHAPTER VI.

NO COWARD.

BY half-past twelve Dixie had shaved, packed his sea-bag and was ready to catch the mail-boat. He was going away because he did not see what else he

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could do. Mr. Bruce had asked him to keep his mouth shut, and Mr. Bruce was his friend. But the delta people were his friends also. When he came here four years ago he had been a drifting youngster, half a step up from a tramp. Now the string of tree-hidden houses behind the levee was home. He could not stay here—knowing what he knew—and see men like Big Michel and Paul Marot die in a hopeless fight against the professional killers at the gun club. The thing to do was to get out before trouble really got started. But first he had to say goodbye to Anne.

He found her on the back porch and her smile had a lingering warmth that made him forget everything for a moment. She said:

"You look sleepy, Dixie. Where have you been, you?"

Dixie grinned, feeling good because Anne had wondered about him. But Madame Marot came out and pounced on her daughter. She sent Anne into the house and turned on Dixie grimly.

"It is no use to hang around and bother my daughter, Dixie Bell. We have choose a man for her."

She turned her lean tense back and went inside. Dixie frowned at the closed door. Now he would have to come back and risk the old lady's tongue for a glimpse of Anne. He was glad when old Jean put down the gun he was cleaning and fell into step as he walked away. But they had reached the Marot wharf before old Jean spoke.

"My old woman must have drunk some vinegar, her! I thought you went down with Paul to the prarie, Dixie?"

"I did. I tried to get some geese and when I got back Paul had gone off to tend to his traps or something. I came up with Babe Mouton."

"It is lucky you did not meet some guard and get shot, you. Do you like my Anne, Dixie?"

Dixie swallowed and looked down.

"Yes."

Old Jean puffed hard on his pipe and terrific tobacco smoke blew down the wind. "I know how it is to be young and like somebody. You are a good boy, Dixie."

He was sorry that Anne was being taken away from Dixie. Probably he did not think much of Henry. Old Jean was a good guy, and wise.

The sun had come out and the river was grey-blue with shining flecks of light where the wind creased it. Two white trappers' boats looked pretty as they rounded the bend and fought their way up stream. Dixie watched them, trying to make out what boats they were. Suddenly he pointed.

"Look! Isn't that Paul and Michel Marceau?"

Paul's boat was following close in the wake of Big Michel Marceau's launch. Dixie and Old Jean caught the lines and deftly made fast. All the while, Dixie was looking for Paul. He did not see him. In the cabin window of his boat Big Michel's face looked dark and drawn.

He left the wheel and disappeared. In a moment, he came backing from the cabin. His partner followed. Between them they carried a stretcher, improvised out of coats and boat-hooks. A blanket covered the stretcher, but it did not cover Paul Marot's bloody face.

Old Jean bent over his son, touching his face with gnarled fingers that trembled.

"He lives!"

Big Michel nodded darkly. "He is bad hurt, him."

Dixie followed the stretcher into the house. Madame Marot had her cheek against Paul's and cried to him in French as if to wake him up. Henry bent over, white faced and tense. Anne stood a little apart with her hands pressed tight against her cheeks. But it was Anne who recovered first.

"Will you keep him here to suffer all day? Run, run someone to get Dr. Perrin! He is down at the Rigo's where a baby is born. Put Paul in bed. I will bring hot water, me."

THE doctor, anxious faced and silent, passed through to the bedroom. The men relaxed into chairs and for a while silence oppressed the room. Then the

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deep growl of old Jean's voice asked where Paul had been found. Big Michel and his partner had started over to Paul's camp to share a bottle of wine. Taking a short cut across Gun Club land they had come upon his boat tied to a bank. They soon found his overturned pirogue, but at first they could not find Paul, though the water was stained red. He was lying ten yards away, with his face in a tangle of reeds and his body in the water.

" It was a miracle of the good God he was not drown," Big Michel said. "Two inch more and his nose would have been in water."

A sort of silence settled again. No one spoke, but the room was full of small noises; chair-creaks, the scratch of a match, heavy breathing. The others watched the bed-room door with that steady, alert calm which hunters learn, but Henry Marot could not sit still. He picked at his face and twiddled a gaudy ring on his finger. His eyes roved restlessly over the room. Contempt filled Dixie. A fight was looming and Henry was obviously afraid. His eyes met Dixie's and for an instant hatred settled over his features. But he looked quickly away.

The doctor came out quietly and there was not even the sound of breathing while they waited for him to speak.

" I'm going to take him up to the hospital. He has a slight concussion of the brain and a bad wound in his chest. It isn't fatal. If he recovers consciousness, he'll live."

" But," old Jean said, " but will he wake up again?"

" There's a chance. I'll be back in time to get him aboard the mail-boat."

The doctor went out carrying his black bag. Old Jean looked around the room.

" If Paul is die, who will go with me to hunt the man that has kill my son?"

There was a chorus in answer. They loudly said that they would all go, and no one noticed that Dixie remained silent. He looked at their dark, determined faces and found the sight hard to bear. Big Michel had come home from the world war with a D.S.O. Nick Brankovitch, the burly Slavonian whose people had settled here when he was a child, had once swum the Mississippi in winter to get to his sick wife. But the men at the Gun Club were killers by trade, and courage would not make up for the difference between rifles and machine guns.

" We will hunt them just like duck and goose," old Jean growled. " We will not give them no chance. They did not give a chance to Paul and Charley Corbeau."

Big Michel rose and flexed his great shoulders. " It is not good that we go down there one and one. We must meet together and make a plan.

The others nodded. Old Jean growled: " Call them together tonight, Michel. Whether Paul die or don't die we have got to fight."

Henry Marot got up and took his hat from the table. " I will go down to the prarie right now," he said. " Maybe I can find where these guards hide themselves. It will be good to know where they are, and I am not afraid. I hate the man who shot Paul so bad I don't care what will happen to me."

He hurried out before anyone could answer.

" Henry is brave, him," said Big Michel.

DIXIE did not take the mail-boat. He could not go until he knew whether Paul would live. But every time he spoke to anyone, or looked at the houses nestling behind the levee, or saw a trap hanging beside a kitchen door he remembered what was going to happen to his friends when they went into duck club territory. All day he avoided people. But he could not keep away from Anne. In the evening he walked down to the Marot house and found her alone. They sat on the back porch and each felt better for the presence of the other.

" Dixie," Anne said out of a long silence, " Dixie," I am afraid, me."

" Don't worry," Dixie said. Paul's going to be all right. You'll see."

Anne sat with her head bent over hands

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folded in her lap. She looked very small and young.

"But maybe he will die, Dixie. Maybe Paul will die and my papa will get killed, too. He is gone down to the Sardu's where they are plan how to fight these duck club men. Maybe tomorrow my father will come home dead. I tell you I am afraid, Dixie!"

"Maybe they won't go. They didn't do themselves any good fighting the duck club before. Maybe they'll remember that and keep off the club land."

Anne shook her head. "They will go. The men around here get mad easy. They talk loud and mad and then don't do nothing. But this time is different. They are mad way down in their heart."

In a neighboring house a woman was singing. Dixie wished she would stop. It did not seem right to sing. In the fields back of the house, night birds called, and the river noises came faintly to Dixie and Anne.

"If Paul is die and my father is killed, what will I do, Dixie? Maybe my heart will break and I will die. But my mama says women don't die because they are sad. If I live who will take care of me?"

"Henry."

"No, Dixie! Do not say that! It is what make me afraid most of all. Who will make Henry be nice to me if my father and brother are gone?"

"Maybe," Dixie said, "Henry will get killed, too."

"You are fool, Dixie Bell! Henry will take care he don't get killed, him!"

She was right. Henry would be sure to keep out of harm's way. He would come back and Anne's mother would make her marry him. Life would be hell for her.

"Look," Dixie said, standing up. "You go to sleep, Anne. Paul's going to get well and your father isn't going to get killed. It's all going to come out all right."

Anne stood up, too. In the lamp light from the window her pale, wistful face was more than Dixie could bear to look at.

"Don't," he said, slipping his arm about her. "Don't be afraid, Anne."

Blue tobacco smoke hung thick in Sardu's small living room where a silence had fallen when Dixie stepped through the door. Except for Len Hammer, who was down with malaria, all of the community's best men were among the dozen present. Three were indisputably the leaders; old Jean Marot, big Michel and crabbed old man Sardu. Big Michel said:

"Where have you been, Dixie? I have sent twice for you to come and help us plan this fight.

DIXIE shut the door and put his back against it. "Listen!" he said. "You think they're running a Duck Club down there. But it's no more a Duck Club than Sing-Sing prison. A bunch of racketeers have taken it over, and believe me those guys are tough! You don't stand a show against them—not a show!"

They stared at him. Old Jean said—"How do you know this, Dixie?"

He told what he had seen at the club, leaving out Mr. Bruce. The trappers swore and exclaimed, but old Jean looked at him with eyes half shut and critical.

"Why didn't you tell before, you?"

Dixie looked down and fumbled with his hat while he tried to think of an answer. He knew that his silence looked bad, but how could he tell them that he had betrayed a friend by letting out the truth about the Gun Club. Big Michel saved him.

"It is no difference whether he has tell now or this morning. He has save us our life."

There was a murmur of agreement. Old man Sardu spat tobacco juice into a box beside the stove.

"This has take a big weight off my mind. The only thing that worried me was fighting rich men. But a thief can't have you arrested, no."

Big Michel nodded. "Now all we have got to do is fight."

"Didn't you hear me say those guys were tough?" Dixie took a step and raised his voice to argue. "Red Hanford—the guy that shot up the Indiana prison—is

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down there, and some more like him. They've got a machine gun and they'll blast you right off the praprie. You're crazy to go up against them."

Old Jean scowled at him. "They have kill Charley Corbeau and shot Paul. Don't tell us men of the delta what to do, Dixie Bell!"

Dixie, about to argue further, dropped his arms and closed his mouth. He could not stop them, no matter what he said. His stomach felt queer inside him. He had betrayed Mr. Bruce to save their lives, and he had failed. Old man Sardu's harsh voice brought him up short.

"I am afraid something has happen to Henry Marot. No man here knows where these men of the club keep themselves. We have got to depend on you, Dixie."

Dixie stared at him, then looked at the floor. He could not fight Mr. Bruce. He would have to tell them so. But when he looked up again the words stuck in his throat. He had hunted with Big Michel and eaten at the Sardu's table when he hadn't a cent to his name. Paul had been his friend; Anne his sweetheart. Old Jean growled:

"I never thought I would see you act a coward, Dixie Bell!"

Dixie's hands clenched till the knuckles went white.

"I'll go!" he said.

CHAPTER VII.

FREE.

LAUNCHES had to go down the river to Tiger Pass, but pirogues could short-cut through the prarie to the club. Dixie rode with Big Michel, who could out paddle any two men and said Dixie only made him trouble. So he had nothing to do but watch the fitful play of moonlight over marsh and water. The deeper they went into gun club territory the more nervous Dixie grew. Their only chance was to rush in and surprise the club just before dawn when the night's work was done and nobody up for the day. But if Mr. Bruce had been warned they would be mowed down like swimming ducks before a pump gun, and Dixie had a notion that Henry Marot might be in Mr. Bruce's pay.

Henry had talked pretty big about going down to scout the club. "He is brave, him" Michel had said. But it seemed funny that a man who was afraid to stand up and fight would suddenly get so much courage. Henry had been in a big hurry to get away, too. Another thing was Henry's money. Friends and relatives had always considered him shiftless and trifling; now he was making more than any trapper had made before, working alone.

The bayou branched to run around a wide triangle of higher land. Dixie could see tall willow trees growing on the point. Clouds half veiled the moon, but he could also see the ghostly line of pirogues filing ahead. Dixie and Michel were last. In the lead old man Sardu swung into the left hand channel and disappeared.

Dixie turned clear around to look behind. He had done so a dozen times and seen nothing. Even now he was not sure of what he saw, but it looked like a light flashing between the reeds on top a six foot bank. He fixed his eyes on the spot and waited for the flash to come again. Big Michel said:

"Sit still, Dixie! All night you have wiggle like a monkey."

"I saw a light up there."

Michel let the pirogue drift broadside and looked where Dixie pointed. Clouds had covered the moon making such darkness that a candle would have shown clearly. Michel shook his head.

"Your eyes have play you a trick, Dixie."

"You put me ashore, Michel. Tell the others to wait."

Michel said they had no time to waste on foolishness. What, he wanted to know, would anybody be doing here with a light.

"I've got a hunch, Michel. If I'm right hell's going to pop around here. If I'm wrong you can kick my pants up around my collar."

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He made his way over soggy ground through saw grass that caught at his pant-legs. It was so dark that his outstretched hands touched reeds before he knew that he had reached the bank of a bayou coming in from the east. The light had seemed to be on the other side of this bayou, where the bank was higher. Cautiously he parted the reeds and advanced till his exploring foot found empty space.

The moon came out suddenly, as if someone had drawn a curtain. White light fell on dark water a yard below Dixie's feet. It gleamed on the sides of a pirogue and showed the features of a man in the stern. Henry Marot was frightened, but his left hand brought his rifle up as his right dropped the paddle. Dixie's pistol was under his mackinaw jacket. He ripped a button open and saw Henry bring the rifle to his shoulder.

Dixie's leap carried him half way to Henry. A shot rang. Then icy water closed over him. Soft mud oozed round his feet, clutching at him as he sprang upward. He kicked free and his head broke water. He could stand and he could see Henry only a few yards away.

Dixie ducked under as the rifle went off. When he came up again he was within a step of the pirogue. He lunged for it as the rifle crashed again. The bullet seemed to brush his jaw, but he caught the gunwale and wrenched.

The rifle barrel caught his head a glancing blow and the sights gouged his cheek. The pirogue went over.

Henry was in the water, rising head and shoulders above him. Half dazed Dixie caught the rifle and held on. His hand slipped as Henry wrenched. He had to hold on—that was all Dixie knew. His head buzzed and his senses were unclear. A far-away crackle sounded strangely like fire crackers. His hand slipped again and he grabbed on with the other. As they wrestled Henry's feet slipped and they went down together.

They came up still struggling for the rifle, but the water had cleared Dixie's head a little. He let go with his right hand and drove his fist upward at Henry's jaw. Not clean enough. He struck again.

HENRY sagged gently forward and sank. His hat floated down the bayou. The far-off crackle sounded in Dixie's ears, but he was still somewhat dazed. He waited till Henry came up, then grabbed him by the collar and dragged him ashore. By then the sound was dying away. Realization came suddenly to Dixie; that noise was rifle-fire. The trappers had run into an ambush. Henry Marot had signalled which bayou they took and the men from the club had been ready.

Dixie sat down shakily. When he got over this dizzy feeling he would right Henry's pirogue and go to find out whether any were left. There was no more shooting now. Frogs croaked and sleepy birds complained. It was hard to think of Big Michel floating face up in water that reddened around him.

"Dixie! Are you 'live or dead?"

Big Michel's voice trailed off into French. He always talked French when he was excited. Dixie stood up.

"Here! Up this bayou, Michel!"

One by one the pirogues came into the bayou and the men climbed out. Only one had to be carried—a young trapper with a bullet in his thigh. Nick Brankovitch had a gashed shoulder, but was active as ever. Michel, catching up with the next pirogue, had passed the word down the line. Old man Sardu had turned back, but they were close enough to be seen. A terrific burst of shooting had caught the last pirogues. Only the uncertain light had saved the leaders from being wiped out. But the gun club men did not follow. While still hunting for Dixie they heard the sound of a powerful boat going away.

It was very cold and raw. Enough wood was gathered to build a small fire which flickered over the circle of faces and made them look browner and more grim. While Dixie was telling his story, Henry started to groan. But no one paid him any attention, even when he sat up and stared around him.

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Afterward, they looked at him; when Dixie finished every eye was turned toward Henry. But no one spoke. They were waiting for old Jean Marot. Henry was his nephew.

Old Jean leaned forward with his big hands resting on his knees. He was not the warm-hearted, good-natured Jean Marot of every day. His face looked knotty, like some weathered root of hardwood.

" Henry," he said, " We know what you have do tonight. But this is not the first time you have gone against your friends and the men of your own blood."

Henry had been looking around the circle like an animal searching for a way out of its cage. But now he shot one startled glance at old Jean and raised his hands.

" No!" he said. " I didn't do that, me!"

" What, Henry? What is it you have not do?"

" I did not shoot Paul!"

Old Jean leaned still farther forward and looked at Henry through half shut eyelids.

" Now I know that you lie," he said. " You would not deny something of which you were not accuse' unless you had do it. But I do not see why. You were paid by the club to keep off us delta men from their land. But why did you shoot Paul, who is cousin to you?"

Henry had a hard time answering. His face worked as his emotions churned within him. Finally, the words burst out.

" Because I hate him! I have always hate him!"

THERE was a pause. Old Jean sat staring at Henry and Henry looked away. But no one spoke until the old man's deep, growling voice commenced again.

" Soon we will understand everything. Why did you help those men who would have kill us tonight?"

" I couldn't help it! They made me."

" That is lie. You did not have to go down to the club, you! Why did you go?"

" Paul—if Paul gets well he will tell you—"

" Paul saw who shot him so you had to run away," old Jean said, cutting him short. " But you have not tell why you were here to make signals. They would have killed me—Jean Marot, your uncle. Do you hate me, too?"

" They made me! I told them you would come and they must run away. They laughed. Then they made me go back and wait to give the signal. They were going to kill me for refuse."

" You could have run away."

" I was afraid."

Henry looked at the ground when he said it. Dixie thought that he spoke the truth, in part. He was afraid of Mr. Bruce, but Henry also must know that if Paul died and his uncle were killed he would be head of the family. Anne's mother would have made her marry him, and the Marot property would have been his. Something like this must have been stirring in old Jean's mind.

" For money, you have tried to kill me and my son. If Paul is live I might forgive you this. You are son to my brother. But you have been traitor to your own people." Old Jean slowly drew a big revolver which he held loosely in front of him. " You have turned enemy to us men of the delta—for pay. Sit still, Henry."

Henry raised his hands. " No!" His voice was high and thin. " No! You are uncle to me. I am promise to Anne. Let me go to jail. Let me—"

" Sit still, Henry."

The big gun crashed. No one moved while old Jean got slowly up and crossed to turn Henry's body over. He looked at the wound and shook his head.

" Now we will go on, us."

THE trappers knew the prarie as truck drivers know the streets of a town. They did not bother about the guards that might be stationed below, but went by small and devious waterways only a pirogue could get through. It was a wise precaution against ambush, though Dixie thought that Mr. Bruce would have withdrawn all but one or two of his men to the club. Mr.

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Bruce was smart, but he did not know the delta trappers. He thought that a death or two would frighten them.

It was almost daylight when they gathered in the marsh behind the club. Dixie and two trappers crossed to the high ground. Before the guard knew that people were near, a coat was over his head and arms pressing it tight across his mouth. Other hands seized his arms and tide them behind him. They left him securely bound in the bottom of a pirogue.

One party under old Jean went down to the left, behind the hangar and the boat house. Another party under big Michel would flank the club house on the right. Dixie was in the center with old man Sardu. They would charge in all together at 5:10 in the morning.

In silence they climbed the bank and waited in silence between the trees. As before, Dixie could see the cooks working down below. But this morning there was no lighted window in the club. He looked over old man Sardu's shoulder at the slowly moving hands of a big old-fashioned watch. It was 5:08. The glow from the lights in front of the club was beginning to pale. Day would be here before long. In the heavy silence, a startled exclamation from the hangar was like a bomb. Dixie jumped, and old man Sardu sucked in his breath. A voice roared: " Put up your hands, you!"

Feet were pounding the floor inside the club. The cooks stopped work and ran to the screen. There was just one explanation for all this: Old Jean Marot had launched the attack too soon.

Old man Sardu took it calmly enough. " We have got to go," he said, and nudged the man next to him. This man's name was Garon and he had the biggest voice in the delta. " Call the others," said old man Sardu.

" Come on, Michel!"

Garon's whoop blasted the trappers out of the trees into the open. But Dixie was watching the hangar out of the corner of his eye. A man came out and for a moment his bald head gleamed in the light. Dixie remembered that the mechanic who had taken him to Mr. Bruce was bald-headed. He came out with a leap that ended in the lake. Another figure followed. There came the slam of a shot and the second mechanic dropped like a quail.

Lights went on—big flood lights at each corner of the club house roof. They made the space behind the club as light as day. A crash of gunfire broke the prarie silence into a thousand pieces. It was the kind of shooting Dixie expected; close range murder with guns that shot too fast—Luger pistols with magazines holding fifty shells, and automatic rifles.

THE trappers had never seen anything like this before. Garon, the man with the big voice, stumbled and fell close beside Dixie. Others were down. It was too much. All in a minute the charge of the trappers broke. They ran back to the protecting trees and threw themselves flat in the grass. Bullets sang over their heads. Old man Sardu pulled the men together.

" Shoot at the windows," he said. " Tell them all to shoot at the windows."

Men passed the word to each other and a slow, methodical fire broke out along the tree line. Old man Sardu shot at the flood-lights. But they were placed under the eaves and protected. He could not break them. The trappers could not hit men hidden in darkened rooms. Big Michel came over to where Dixie and Sardu lay. His face had become bloody from wiping a wounded hand on it.

" It is no good," he said. " We can't do no good here."

Old man Sardu gestured toward the hangar—" We still have the little building. We will make another try from there, us."

The men moved noiselessly through the trees, for they were trappers and hunters. They did not talk. But they would have been quiet if there had been no need for caution. Three of their friends were dead. There were only nine left.

They went down well below the buildings, crossed the open space and came up behind the boat house. Then, one at a time, they ran forward to the shelter of the

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hangar wall. The gun club people saw them, and shot at them, but no one was hit. The light had gained until the outlines of the buildings stood out plain. Out in the lake the big cruiser was running. The mechanic had swum to her and now stood by, ready to run away or to take off those on shore if they asked for it.

Still, the light was not too strong. It was a tricky light; half day and half electric where the floodlights glowed. Some of them might reach the club house and break through the screens. But not enough. Those who got in would be killed, too. Big Michel said: "I will go first, me."

He went around the corner and Dixie followed, shoulder to shoulder with Nick Brankovitch. But they halted in their tracks. Down the beach, a knot of men moved toward them swiftly, looking ghostly and half-real in the uncertain light. Mr. Bruce had not waited; he was carrying the fight to them. Michel threw up his rifle and let go a shot.

Instantly, an automatic rifle set up its stammering clatter. The first spray of bullets struck up muddy sand at their feet.

"Back!" Dixie said. "For God's sake get back!"

They reached the shelter of the wall before the gunner got their range. Bullets clanged against the corrugated iron; they slapped the water and whined away. No man could put his head out into that stream of lead and the trappers knew better than to wait until the gunner turned the corner. They ran for the trees again.

The gun club men burst into sight. For a moment, the clattering gun was still while they looked around for the trappers. Dixie tried to pick out Mr. Bruce, but they were too far away. Old man Sardu's rifle spoke at his shoulder. A man in the group staggered. They charged as if the shot had been a signal.

THE man with the automatic rifle ran a little ahead of the rest. Dixie recognized him as Red Hanford. He held the heavy gun at his hip and swung it back and forth as he ran. Dixie could hear the bullets cut grass tops behind him. But the trappers had opened up in good earnest, now. Their rifles cracked in a steady rip of sound, and three of Mr. Bruce's men went down in quick succession. The group faltered and stopped. One man snatched up a comrade and ran. They helped another to his feet. For a moment, they wavered — then went back toward the hangar.

But Red Hanford kept coming. All the while the automatic rifle sprayed the grass with lead, and he was making good time. If ever he got among them the trappers were done for. Dixie steadied his pistol wrist and fired. He missed, and knew that Big Michel had missed also by the way he cursed. Others were firing. Their bullets ploughed up dirt about Red Hanford's feet. He did not seem to care; even when a bullet in the leg made him stagger he came on toward the trees. Somebody said: "Get him, Sardu!"

Dixie turned his head and saw the old man's finger crooked round the trigger. Once he had been the best hunter in the delta, but it was long since he had gone out. The rifle cracked with a clean sound. Red Hanford came on for three full steps. Then he pitched forward on his head.

Dixie jumped up, meaning to go down for the automatic rifle. Even if they got no chance to use it he did not want it turned on them again. But one of the gun club men was coming forward alone. Dixie knew him by the way he carried himself. There was all the difference in the world between Mr. Bruce and Red Hanford. Even now, in the semi-darkness, he looked like someone you would like to know.

The trappers were shooting at Mr. Bruce, but as with Red Hanford the bad light was in his favor. He had not far to go, now, to reach the gun. Dixie glanced at old man Sardu. He was savagely jamming cartridges into the magazine of his gun. Mr. Bruce picked up the automatic rifle just as Sardu snapped the breech of his own weapon shut.

The others stopped firing, content to leave this to Sardu. There was nothing

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Dixie could say or do. He stood rigid beside a tree and watched old man Sardu cradle the stock against his face. His wrinkled cheek puckered up around his eye, and his hands were like wood where they held the gun. His crooked finger tightened slowly on the trigger.

Dixie waited—and waited. Mr. Bruce reached the hangar and ran along it. He disappeared around the corner. Old man Sardu laid his rifle gently down and turned his face up to Dixie.

"He is one brave, that man. My mind said: 'Shoot, Sardu!' But my hands they would not shoot."

Quiet came suddenly. The trappers tended to each other's wounds. Mr. Bruce seemed satisfied with driving them back from the hangar. There was no more shooting from the club. It was day, now. The lights went out.

Big Michel and old Jean and Sardu gathered for a council. Dixie was there, too, but he did not say anything. He let them argue as to whether it would be best to rush the club from the ends, or to come in from behind all together.

He was silent so long that Big Michel turned to him.

"What is it you are think, Dixie? You do not say one word, you."

"I think it's crazy to go on fighting! Look, three men are dead — and two crippled so bad they can't help. We can't do anything against the guns they've got, and them fighting behind shelter. The thing for us to do is pull out of here."

"Are we to be whipped by a bunch of thief?"

DIXIE had never tried harder in his life than he tried now to convince these men that they ought to give up this fight.

"Look," he said. "We've done them plenty of harm, too. It's about even so far. And they'll have to get out, now that we've been down here. They know we know they're running a racket here. That ought to be enough. There's no need to get us all killed off."

Old Jean Marot frowned; looking at Dixie out of half-shut eyes.

"There's something funny the matter with you, Dixie. First you did not tell what you knew about this club at the time you should have tell it. And ever since you have been argue with us not to fight. What is wrong with you?"

"You're friends of mine," Dixie said. "And I know how tough these guys are. I hate to see you get killed."

Old Jean nodded gravely, but his eyes were still half closed, searching Dixie's face.

"This I believe. But there is more. What is on your mind, Dixie?"

Dixie had never intended to tell about Mr. Bruce. But now it did not matter whether they knew or not. He was all mixed up. Nothing would ever be the same after today.

"I—" he said. "There's a friend of mine in the club. He's a guy that's done plenty for me."

Again they stared at him. "But you came with us to fight against him," said Big Michel.

"I knew how tough they were," Dixie repeated. "I didn't want to see you get killed. And after I got into it—I had to go on."

There followed a long silence. The lake smoked as the sun burned away the morning mists. All about them the trees and grass were alive with chattering birds. Everything was just like it always was down here in the prarie. Only the men were different. Big Michel took up a stick and made marks on the bare ground between two tree roots.

"I know how it is, me," he said gently. "One time two of my cousins were fight most bad. I could not help one without hurt the other—and they were both good men, them. I did not know what to do. But it is best that you don't fight no more, Dixie. We are going to finish off these men or die. That is how we have to do. It is best that you leave us."

"But—" Dixie said.

"You should not fight your friend," old Jean growled. "You are no delta man,

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Dixie Bell. Leave us to do this thing by ourselves."

They meant it. They were sending him away so he would not have to go against Mr. Bruce any more. And if they lived they would not hold this leaving against him. He was free.

CHAPTER VIII.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

KEEPING to the shelter of trees Dixie crossed the high ground and dropped down to the marsh below. But he did not cross to the pirogues; he sat on a log. He could not go away and leave them. It was like it had been before, up in the settlement; he knew that the thing to do was go, but he could not go. He had to stay and do something.

But he did not know how he could help. The trappers would rush the club, and the men inside would shoot them down and that would be the end. Maybe Mr. Bruce would be killed, too.

Dixie suddenly got up from the log. If he could make Mr. Bruce leave, there would be no more fight. And there was a way to make him leave. No man would stay in the club house if it caught on fire. The cruiser was there to take them off.

A quarter mile below the club Dixie stripped to his underwear and wriggled through grass to the lake's edge. The water was freezing cold, but swimming helped to keep him warm. He slid along with an old-fashioned breast-stroke which kept him low in the water. If the mechanic aboard the cruiser saw him it would be just too bad. But that was the chance he had to take. Nearing the wharf he swam more slowly, letting his body sink at the end of every stroke.

When Dixie left the water beneath the pier the air seemed colder than the lake had been. He stuck his head out around a piling. There was no one in front of the club. He could see no one in the windows. Dixie ducked under a string piece and ran. No alarm had sounded when he passed the pond full of gold fish. There was a door straight ahead.

In spite of its screen sides, the room in which he found himself was dim. There were crates and barrels stacked up, and over in one corner some oil drums. A few gallons of crude oil poured over crates would start a fire in a few seconds. Dixie came out around a pile of barrels, heading for the drums.

"Stand right theah, white boy! Don't you move."

Dixie jumped nearly out of his underwear. He turned and saw the white apron and gleaming teeth of a negro cook. Nothing else was visible except the whites of his eyes.

The white spots changed as his eyes rolled. This darkey was scared.

"You and me," he said, "we're goin' to stay right heah. Nor you nor any otheh white man is goin' to get me in this fight. I cooks an' I minds my own business, an' this ain't my fight. You be good, white boy."

He sat down on a crate and brandished something that gleamed. It was a pistol. Dixie sat down on another box.

The momentary numbness of surprise was still upon him, when the door opened. A voice spoke and someone began to toss boxes aside. A pile of crates hid the men from Dixie. The negro leaned toward him.

"Don't you move!" he whispered. "An' don't you open yoah mouth!"

The last thing Dixie wanted to do was move or open his mouth. He sat still, listening. The noise stopped abruptly.

"All right, Clancy."

The voice was Mr. Bruce's. In a moment, Dixie could see him. There was an opening which gave a direct view of the corner of the room, which was also the corner of the building. Mr. Bruce stood there, silhouetted against the light. A man with big shoulders joined him. He was carrying something. Mr. Bruce pointed. "Right there," he said.

The man set the thing down and stepped back. He had brought the machine gun that had stood in front of the club. Mr.

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Bruce got down on one knee, took hold of the grip, and pointed the gun.

"A little more to the right," he said.

They set the gun carefully. From this position they could rake the whole back end of the club with an enfilading fire. No one who came up to the club would have a chance.

"We'll wait right here," Mr. Bruce said. "They'll be coming again before long, the fools!"

The other man grunted profanity. "Who'd have thought a bunch of web-footed Cajuns would tear into us like this?"

THEY had to kill Big Michel and old Jean and Nick Brankovitch and old man Sardu. They were standing at ease, now—just waiting for the trappers to come. Dixie had felt a stone while shifting his foot. Keeping his eyes on the negro he leaned swiftly down and seized it. The negro's head was turned from Dixie to watch the two in the corner. The stone was a little bigger than an egg. Dixie closed his fist over it. With one swift motion he got up and hit the negro on the jaw.

His bare fist could never have bothered that thick head, but the rock did the business. The negro fell sidewise, and Dixie caught him. He laid him on the ground and took up the gun. His fingers were bruised from the blow and he had to wiggle life back into them before he was sure he could pull the trigger.

He worked his way swiftly through the litter of crates and barrels until a clear space stopped him. The oil drums would shield Dixie while he tipped one over and set the place on fire, but to reach them he would have to expose himself for an instant. It was lighter here beside the screen wall. Mr. Bruce's face stood out as clear as the profile on a coin. But he and his helper were looking the other way.

Keeping his eyes on them, Dixie stepped clear of a box and tensed his muscles for a quick dash.

The negro's groan was like an unhappy cow. Mr. Bruce spun on his feet, reaching for a shoulder gun. The other man cursed. Dixie brought up his pistol and took a step forward.

"Mr. Bruce—"

For an instant all motion stopped in the two men. Then Mr. Bruce's hand dropped. The other man's arms rose over his head as if the motion were automatic.

"I wasn't expecting you, Dixie."

"Mr. Bruce," Dixie said, "If you'll promise to take your men out of here, I'll put up my gun."

Mr. Bruce was smiling as if cynically amused. "Did you bring these Cajuns down here, Dixie?"

"They were coming anyway. Honest! They're friends of mine, too. They—"

There was no use in standing here like a school kid trying to explain to teacher. Keeping his gun leveled at Mr. Bruce, Dixie took a step backward—toward the oil drums. Mr. Bruce watched him without moving. But at the second step a flicker of movement drew Dixie's eye to the other man. He was reaching for his gun, but stopped when Dixie's pistol pointed at him. His hands rose over his head again.

Instinctively Dixie shifted his aim once more, and just in time. Mr. Bruce had already put his hand inside his coat. But he did not take it out under the threat of Dixie's gun. He was going to draw. The blue double-breasted suit he wore made a dark continuous mass of the upper part of his body. It was hard to aim for a spot between his neck and shoulder and still not sight too high.

"Mr. Bruce—"

Dixie might have spoken into empty air for all the good it did. Mr. Bruce whipped out his gun and he fired to save himself. Shock jerked at Mr. Bruce's features. Instead of grasping his shoulder he doubled at the waist and toppled forward.

FOR a moment, Dixie stood wondering how he could have aimed at the shoulder and hit Mr. Bruce in the belly. Then he took hold of himself and walked forward. The other man stood with his mouth hanging open all the while Dixie was taking away his guns.

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"Do what I say and I'll give you a break."

The man was too frightened to answer, but he walked ahead when Dixie prodded him with the gun. A voice above yelled, asking what the shooting was about.

"Tell him it's okay."

The man called up obediently.

They were on their way to the settlement within half an hour. Three of the gun club people were prisoners, including Mr. Bruce. Four had escaped on the cruiser. The rest were dead. All of the wounded trappers would live, so they had only lost three. All this meant very little to Dixie. Splinters of bone were sticking into his flesh and the motion of the boat tortured him. At the settlement Dr. Perrin shot a narcotic into his leg while he cleaned the wound and set the bone. Then he put Dixie to sleep with an opiate.

When he woke there was daylight in the white-washed bedroom. Anne stood in the middle of the floor staring at him.

Old Jean's face still looked like hard wood, but now he was smiling.

"Paul is 'live," he said. "He is going to get all right. How do you feel, you?"

"Fine!" Dixie said, and winced as pain shot along his leg. He lay frowning at the ceiling. But it was no good putting it off.

"How's Mr. Bruce?"

"Your friend? He is up to Len's. Sometime he is himself, sometime he don't know nothing."

It was like the delta people to take care of Mr. Bruce. He was their enemy, but he was a brave man badly hurt. It was like them, too, not to turn him over to the police.

"I'm going up to Len's," Dixie said. "Get my clothes, will you, Anne?"

Anne told him that he was not going any place. It would kill him, she said. But old Jean told her to hush. He himself, cut Dixie's pant-leg to get it over the plaster cast, and carried him out to the car. Old Jean understood why he had to go, though he did not say anything about it.

Dixie made his way into the bedroom on a pair of borrowed crutches. Mr. Bruce's eyes were sunk deep in his white face, but they looked a darker, more intense blue than ever before.

"Hello," he said, and made a little motion of his head toward Dr. Perrin, who sat beside him. "You did a good job, Dixie. The doctor says I'm going to die, soon."

Dixie came closer and stood looking down at Mr. Bruce's face. It was very hard to talk.

"Mr. Bruce—It was an accident, see? I tried to plug you in the shoulder. But there wasn't much time. I was excited."

He kept on looking, trying to make Mr. Bruce believe that he had not set out to kill him.

"No," Mr. Bruce said, "there wasn't much time. I was pulling the trigger when you got me. No hard feelings, Dixie."

He smiled, and Dixie felt a little better. He sank into the chair, easing his painful leg. He had to say some more, but words and ideas were all jumbled in his mind. Looking down at his hands didn't help any, though. He straightened up and began.

"I let you down, Mr. Bruce. I told them about your racket, too. I feel like a louse."

Mr. Bruce was looking at him, waiting for him to go on.

"I didn't want to, see? I was going to pull out and not say anything. You're a good guy and you've done plenty for me. But Paul came home all shot up and they were going down to tackle you. They didn't know what they were up against—and all of a sudden I told them. Seemed like I couldn't help it. Afterward it was the same way. I didn't want to go against you, but I couldn't help it."

Dixie stared at him. "You don't think I'm a rat?"

"Of course not, Dixie. You had to do what you did. And if I'm not sorry to die, why should you worry about killing me?"

Dixie frowned, trying to understand what he meant.

"Thanks," he said. "Goodbye, Mr. Bruce."

"Take care of yourself, Dixie."

THE END

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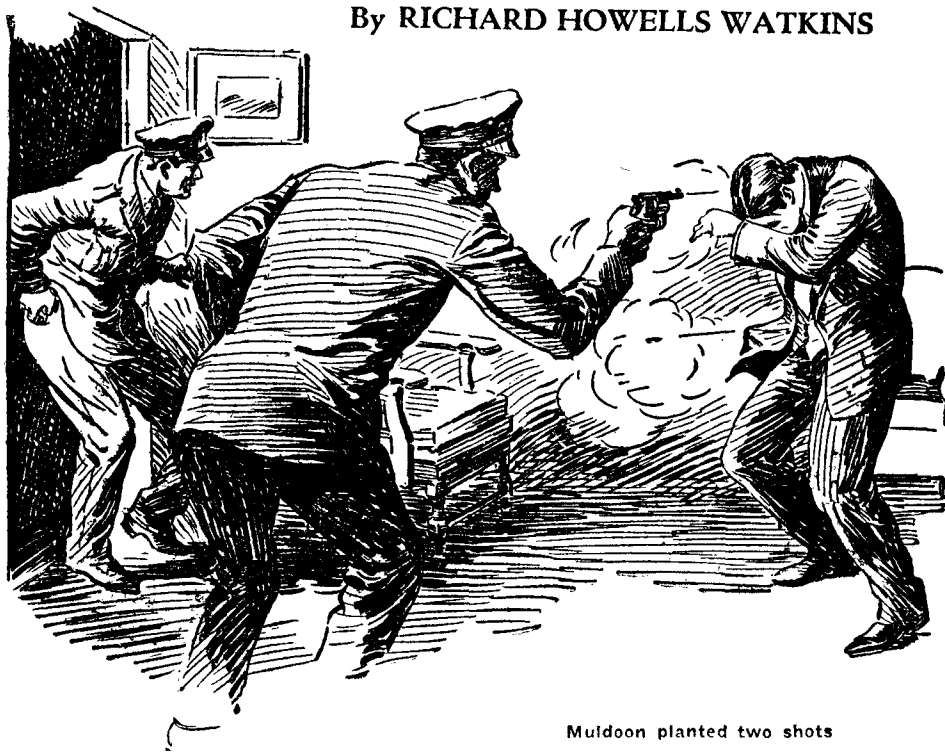
The Phony Alarm

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS



Muldoon planted two shots

Radio Patrolman Muldoon was merely curious, but his curiosity was to unearth an exciting mystery

RADIO PATROL CAR 482, rolling up Ninth Avenue an hour after midnight, grazed an elevated pillar.

"There's something that the detective division ought to know!" the driver, Francis Muldoon, rasped, completely ignoring the close call.

"I wish to blazes the devil would take you to the detective division, you scrawny little scut!" Patrolman John Hand, recorder, cried out. "Then maybe I'd have a chance for my life!"

From Patrolman Muldoon came not a syllable in retort. This was so strange that John Hand took his eye off the next pillar to see what had gotten into his partner.

Muldoon, grim-faced, braked violently just then. With a quick twist of the wheel he ran the little green roadster alongside the curb and stopped.

Half a block farther up Ninth Avenue a tall, heavy-set young gentleman in impeccable evening clothes, with an almost imperceptible droop to his right shoulder, was paying off a taxicab in front of a second rate, glaringly lighted restaurant.

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"Radcliff Armstrong, college graduate, ex-bond salesman, extortioner!" growled Francis Muldoon, as if pronouncing a judgment.

"One arrest, no convictions, no aliases. A keen judge o' men, the high grade hellion! How I hate extortioners!"

He scowled in helpless wrath. "That thug picks his customers soft as well as wealthy and it's known, though there's not the evidence to convict, that he murdered two of 'em before he got his reputation so well fixed that they don't give him trouble any more. Tells 'em a gunman is threatening them—and that he'll protect 'em—for a price!"

He snarled; his anger deepened his voice. "Look at that flat, tough pan o' his—set as rigid as a mask!"

"I know him as well as you do!" John Hand asserted, as the man they watched, followed closely by another, strolled leisurely across the sidewalk toward the restaurant door. "And that chunky, barrel-bellied lad behind him is Herb Boles, who works for him. But what about it? Why get hysterical? The dicks have nothing on Radcliff Armstrong."

"He's turning a trick right now!" the little driver asserted. "He's too stuck on being a gentleman to go into a cheap dump like that except on business. A dick told me all about—"

"Never believe a dick," said Hand. "You're screwy."

But little Muldoon had another idea.

"Listen; Sid Eckert lives around the corner from here on Twenty-fifth!" he said. "Eckert, you thick lug, is the learned counsellor that got Armstrong off with hung juries the two times they tried him for that murder. And—"

"Whee!" interrupted the loudspeaker under the instrument board. "Time is 1 A. M. W.P.E.G. Eight."

By the time John Hand got the time signal down in his book his wiry little driver was squirming on his seat in mounting excitement.

"Guess who was right there inside the restaurant door to meet him!" Muldoon whispered. "Sid Eckert's jackal—Jake Stone!"

"Armstrong must be in trouble," Patrolman Hand remarked, somewhat impressed. "No crook—or anybody else—goes near Sid Eckert unless he has to. It costs too much money."

"Right!" agreed Francis Muldoon curtly. He suddenly put the car in gear, made a U-turn to avoid passing the restaurant, and circled the block. On Twenty-fifth Street he stopped not far from a narrow old brownstone front with a high stoop. In the building two dim lights showed, one in the hall and another in the thick-curtained front parlor to the right of it. This old-fashioned dwelling had been for many years the residence of Sid Eckert, attorney-at-law.

"The greatest public enemy in the city!" Muldoon growled, staring at the house. "Only it's legal to turn crooks loose an' take their loot—defendin' them in court!"

"What do you expect to get out of this snooping beyond a bawling out for neglecting patrol?" John Hand demanded.

"I'd like to know if Eckert, as a side line, points Armstrong to juicy prospects in the extortion business," Muldoon muttered. "If Armstrong's secretly—"

"Now listen!" rasped John Hand. "For one last time let me tell you you're a radio car cop, not a dick! You're paid to patrol, not to throw brainstorms on me! Let in your clutch and get out o' here before—"

HE stopped suddenly. The vestibule door of the brownstone house had opened. Sid Eckert himself, a short, almost emaciated, elderly man with a surprisingly prominent round paunch, had come out on the narrow stoop. He stood there, bareheaded in the warm June night, with a cigarette smouldering in his fingers.

"Come back, you sap!" John Hand muttered, but his partner was already out of the car in a sudden, impulsive thrust.

Patrolman Muldoon walked over to the house and up the steps, greeting the lawyer with an abbreviated salute.

"Ever see anything of Radcliff Arm-

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strong these days, counsellor?" he inquired. "This isn't official but—"

"Haven't run into him for months and don't expect to," interrupted the lawyer, his voice unexpectedly deep and strong, as if it came up from that big, rounded stomach. "Can't keep track of all my past clients. What do you want him for?"

"This isn't official," Patrolman Muldoon said again, emphatically mendacious. "But I heard a detective friend o' mine say the other day that the Property Clerk still has some stuff—money and such taken off Armstrong at the time of his arrest. So, seeing you—"

"Don't know his address," Sid Eckert broke in curtly. "My advice to you—free advice—is keep out of it. None of your business. Be thankful it isn't. Good night."

He turned without ceremony and retreated into his house. Chuckling softly, Muldoon went back to the car and slipped in behind the wheel.

"He spoke so fast I'm dead sure he was lying," he confided to Hand. "A twister like him wouldn't be able to tell the truth unless he spoke slowly, not being used to it."

"You're dick-struck!" the recorder of 482 asserted in exasperation. "Clues, problems, mysteries—you look for 'em like—"

"Like you do pay, promotion an' ham and egg sandwiches," Francis X. Muldoon retorted.

He had started the car; his hapless partner was already on his way elsewhere with him, perhaps to another piece of detective business.

It was detective business. Muldoon ran the car briskly around the corner again and halted near the restaurant into which Radcliff Armstrong and his shadow, Boles, had strolled to meet Eckert's man, Jack Stone. And all Hand's wrath did not stop his partner from leaving the car and taking a look in the door of the restaurant.

None of the three suspects was in sight within. To the fat Italian proprietor, who hurried up at the sight of Muldoon's uniform, the patrolman described Radcliff Armstrong.

"I have a message for him," the cop explained.

The proprietor shrugged his plump shoulders vehemently. "Gone!" he said. "Gone! And the other gentlemen—gone!"

Muldoon was still pleased as he returned to the car. "Crooks don't breeze in and out of restaurants that fast if they're not out for somethin' beyond food," he told John Hand. "I'm wondering if I haven't enough to report to the detective—"

"Try reporting—just try it—with me getting half the reprimand you'd be asking for!"

"But we haven't ducked any calls!" Muldoon protested. "All I've—"

"Whee!" said the loudspeaker. "Car 482—"

"Ah!" grunted John Hand, grabbing at his pencil and book. "Maybe a workout will cure you!"

"—go to Tenth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street. Man with pistol. Signal thirty. Time 1.16. W.P.E.G. Ten."

"Probably a stick-up!" Hand cried. "Get mov—"

BUT 482 was already moving. With no indication that his mind was on anything but his wheel, throttle and brakes, Muldoon was tooling his little roadster up the avenue. Though it was late, Ninth Avenue was by no means deserted.

John Hand, gripping his gun, voiced no complaint now when his little driver grazed or shuttled among the "L" pillars. The green car, siren shrieking, broadsided with screeching tires at a corner to avoid a deaf or utterly brainless pedestrian; then picked up speed again and screamed on. A man with a gun can spread much hell and death in a minute or two and Signal Thirty meant that a felony had been reported by telephone to Headquarters.

Two blocks from Tenth and Thirty-fourth Muldoon cut the siren.

There was no swirling, curious crowd or yelling citizen at the corner to point

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them on their way. The place looked deserted, save for a plump, blue-coated figure on the curb at the southwest section of the cross streets. This patrolman was performing intricate and leisurely feats of juggling with his nightstick. The swift, silent approach of the police car did not interrupt the engrossed officer.

The car squealed to a halt beside the cop. He started violently.

"Got a call—man with gun, Tim!" Muldoon cried. "Where's—"

"Not on my beat—nor anywhere else around here!" the plump patrolman retorted. "They know me too well for that—the heels!"

"Been here long?"

Tim looked cautiously over his shoulder for a lurking shoo-fly before he spoke. "Well, since it's among friends, I don't mind tellin' ye I haven't moved off my feet on this corner for a good twenty minutes," he confided. "Somebody's havin' a bit of fun with Headquarters. There's no man with a gun around here but me."

"Huh!" muttered Francis X. Muldoon in the deepest disgust. "Just when I've got my teeth into something some blasted, crooked slob has to pull a false alarm on the signal monitor! I wonder if Armstrong down below saw us and got scared—suspectin' I was close on his—"

"Off again!" growled Hand. "Any crook would be happy to have you clomping on his trail, you heavy footed scut, you! But Armstrong never saw us. Forget it! I'll report."

He was getting out of the car to hunt a telephone when the loudspeaker went into action again.

"Car 311!" it was calling. "Go to Thirty-third and Seventh Avenue. Sedan reported deserted after hitting store window. Signal 24. Time 1.19. W.P.E.G. Eleven."

"Stay in the car!" cried Muldoon. "D'you see what's happening? Three eleven has the run alongside us. Armstrong is drawing both the cars that patrol past that Ninth Avenue restaurant up to the north ends of their districts! Something's up down there!"

"There's a car up—on the sidewalk at Thirty-third and Seventh," Hand retorted. "Just because some joker— Stop! I've got to report right away!"

But the green roadster was already moving too fast for him to jump. Hand cussed his partner. If 482 did not report to the signal monitor within fifteen minutes another car would be dispatched to Tenth and Thirty-fourth in anticipation of much vigorous action. And when this second car reported a fake alarm and no sign of 482 there would be plenty of action—but it would be concentrated entirely upon the personnel of 482.

NEVERTHELESS, Francis X. Muldoon, like a runaway horse with the bit in his teeth, was heading east on Thirty-fourth. He went out of his district—another practically unpardonable sin—like a charge of shot out of a gun, and inside ninety seconds had skidded around into Thirty-third.

"Ah!" he gritted.

There was no car crashed against a window on Thirty-third Street—no sign of any accident. Muldoon made sure of that without even slowing down and then headed with siren shrilling again back into his own district.

"Now do you believe me?" Muldoon demanded, flattening his throttle as they hit Ninth Avenue. "I tell you Armstrong's drawin' us off! He and that shyster are gettin' together on some rotten deal!"

"He never saw us!" Hand roared back. "You're loopy! Stop! I got to telephone that report before they nail our hides to the door o' the house!"

It didn't do him any good. Muldoon had the controls and Muldoon was very definitely and rapidly going where he wanted to go.

They shrieked to a stop in front of the second rate restaurant. Muldoon slipped out from behind the wheel and ran to the door. Regardless of Hand's warning—a cop is taking a chance when he enters a place

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where liquor is served—Muldoon walked in and confronted the plump proprietor. The radio cop crinkled up his small round face and uptilted nose in a most formidable frown.

"An' where did the—the gentleman go, ye lug?" he demanded harshly. "Speak fast before I tear the words out o' your gullet!"

The stout restaurateur gulped. "The back way, officer—they—there is a way through the yards to Twenty-fifth Street. I saw no harm when Mr. Eckert's friend said it would be all right."

"Ah!" said Muldoon. "And the gentleman made a telephone call before he left?"

Emphatically the man shook his head. "No—they passed right through," he asserted.

"Probably ye lie where ye stand," Muldoon snapped and went back to the car.

"Armstrong back-doored us, Johnny," he said, revving up the motor. "Back-doored us—to Eckert's place."

"Report it and get it off your chest, then," Hand growled. "What—more of this?"

The car was reeling into Twenty-fifth Street. It stopped with a jerk in front of Eckert's house.

"It'll do them no good to know that I'm watchin' them," Muldoon rasped. "Johnny, extortioners and their defenders are two kinds of cattle I have no likin' for! And I can at least call that shyster a liar and prove it this night!"

"You go crashing a citizen's house and Eckert will yap the shield off your tunic about police persecution!" Patrolman Hand moaned.

But when his small partner charged up the steps he got out of the car and followed him on the jump. The light in the front room and that in the vestibule still burned.

MULDOON rang the bell. There was a silence within the house and on the stoop. Muldoon rang again.

Suddenly, with no premonitory noise of footsteps within, the door opened. The pallid, skull-like face and deep-set eyes of Jake Stone, the lawyer's man of all missions, showed in the crack of the door.

Muldoon, after a single look at him, pushed his way in against the limp body of the tall Jake. With a gasp at this audacity John Hand grabbed at the back of his tunic. It did no good. Helplessly he followed Muldoon.

"Trot out your mas—ah, Mr. Eckert has a caller, eh?" Muldoon interrupted himself.

He thrust on into the stuffily furnished front room. John Hand, peering past his partner's head, saw that Muldoon now was confronting the tall and thick-set figure of Radcliff Armstrong. The big man stood by the curtained entrance just inside the front room, hands thrust into pockets.

"Not in—not in!" wailed Jake Stone. "M-Mr. Eckert is—is out!"

"What's the reason for this intrusion, officer?" demanded Radcliff Armstrong. The wrinkles formed by the habitual scowl upon his face deepened a trifle, but otherwise his expression did not change.

Small Patrolman Muldoon blinked at this stone wall. But in no time at all he rallied.

"Intrusion, is it?" he said with a perfect display of indignation. "Intrusion, d'ye call it? Headquarters just this minute broadcast an order for us to come here to this address on the telephone complaint o' Sid Eckert that a crime was being committed."

From behind Muldoon came: "He *telephoned! He*—" those three words and a thin, high-pitched scream. He whirled in time to see gaunt Jake Stone wavering on his feet. Stone's sunken eyes were ablaze with horror; he raised a fleshless finger in a sort of gesture toward the back of the house as if he were pointing at a ghost. Then, abruptly, he fell, completely out.

"Seems a bit nervous," remarked Radcliff Armstrong. He did not move; neither did his face change its expression.

"That's more than can be said for yourself, sir," said Muldoon politely.

His eyes rested for an instant steadily upon John Hand's startled countenance.

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Then he turned toward the rear room which was separated from this one merely by a heavy curtain. "In the absence of the owner I'll just have a look about the premises."

"I wouldn't do that!" said Armstrong sharply. His face was hard as granite, but his body was alive with tensed muscles.

"And why not—since he called us in to stop a crime?" demanded Patrolman Muldoon, cocking his small head and looking back over his shoulder. He took another step toward the curtain.

"I'd wait—wait till he returns!" insisted Armstrong in a vibrant, taut voice. "There's no one here at the moment—but me. Wait!"

"Well—perhaps you're right," Francis Muldoon conceded with reluctance.

THE man had not moved. Feet apart, hands deep in his coat pockets, he stood motionless.

Patrolman John Hand, near him in the hall doorway, had not moved, either.

"A friend of the family, are ye?" Muldoon inquired innocently of Armstrong. "Or maybe a member of the household?"

"Just a friend," said Armstrong.

"Well, as a friend," said Muldoon softly, "will ye just lift that poor fellow that fainted over onto the couch?"

"How about this officer?" asked Armstrong harshly, indicating John Hand with a nod of his head. "Is he a cripple?"

"The two of ye, then," Muldoon conceded. "Help the gentleman, John."

With slitted eyes Radcliff Armstrong looked at Muldoon. The small driver's back was to th curtain now, and his eyes, mirroring a growing surprise, were upon Armstrong.

Slowly Armstrong took his hands out of his pockets. He bent, with a swift glance at Patrolman Hand, beside Jake Stone's attenuated form.

Spinning around, Muldoon leaped toward the curtain that screened the darkened rear room. He tapped it, merely, and then swerved agilely to the left, against the side wall.

From behind that stiff drapery came the instant roar of an automatic. Innocent-looking little holes dotted the hanging around the spot that Muldoon had touched.

To that bellowing gun Muldoon paid not the slightest heed. His own revolver was in his nimble fingers and all his attention was trained on Armstrong.

The big man's right hand had darted back into his pocket as he pivoted toward John Hand. His hard left fist shot toward Hand's jaw. But Hand was flinging himself back, toward the hall, as he dug for his own gun.

Muldoon cut loose. He planted two thirty-eight bullets in Armstrong's massive body. The fast flying chunks of lead knocked him off balance. Though his automatic, still couched in his pocket, blared out at Hand, his shots did not register on the cop. Muldoon had planted his shots before Armstrong's finger had closed at the trigger.

John Hand made good use of the respite his partner's gunfire had given him. When he opened up he had time to aim. And he was in the hallway, safe from the crossfire of the man hidden behind the curtain of the rear room.

Muldoon was dropping. With one hand he ripped down the curtains and curtain pole alike as he flung himself onto his knees.

The falling drapery unmasked Herb Boles. Armstrong's familiar was caught flat-footed behind his vanished cover. As he swung his pistol toward the small target crouching so close to him, Muldoon knocked him sideways with two bullets. Then, leaping up, the cop kicked the gun from Boles' hands as he sprawled on the floor. A tap of his revolver on the point of Boles' jaw put him out of the picture for the moment. The roar of guns ceased.

IN that small, book-lined room revealed by the drop of the curtain, Herb Boles was not the only man lying on the floor. The thin-limbed body of Sid Eckert, with that incongruous paunch of his grotesquely prominent, was stretched flat on his back on a rug. It lay in front of a small wall safe

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masked by a swinging bookcase. The lawyer was dead. His skull had been crushed in almost on the top of his bald head.

John Hand spoke in a rather hoarse voice. "A swell ambush you led me into, Frank—but I'll say you got me out. This one"—his eyes indicated Armstrong—"is through."

"Is *he* dead, too?"

Hand jumped a good six inches at that whisper behind him. Jake Stone had come back to consciousness.

"The two of them—Eckert and Armstrong," Muldoon said. "Talk while we feel like listening to ye, if you're not in it."

"I'm not—I'm not in it!" Jake Stone insisted shrilly. "Le' me tell you! I can prove it, officer!"

He pointed his fleshless finger toward the room where Sid Eckert lay stretched before his safe. "He was getting ready to quit—to retire. Things were getting tough. But he wanted ten thousand more—just a little more."

"You're not telling me he tried to get it off—off Radcliff Armstrong?" Muldoon demanded incredulously.

For an instant Jake Stone's pallid features twisted in a horrible grimace that was intended for a grin. "Just another sucker—that's all Radcliff Armstrong was to Sid Eckert," he mumbled. "He had Armstrong's confession of murder—the murder that he was tried for that Eckert got him sprung on twice—with jury disagreements. The boss—Eckert—got him to make the confession and sign it by telling him he might have to cop the plea—take a manslaughter rap to save himself from the chair—a dicker with the district attorney that only Eckert could get for him."

"Armstrong swallowed that yarn?"

"He wasn't so tough with the chair facing him. None o' them are. Eckert never used the confession—and he never gave it back. Tonight he was going to sell it to Armstrong—Armstrong was only another sucker to Eckert—but Armstrong got ugly and it didn't work out that way."

"I'll say," said Francis X. Muldoon, with a glance at the crumpled skull of the lawyer.

"Then it was Eckert, not Armstrong, who put in those fake calls for radio cars?" John Hand inquired suddenly.

Patrolman Muldoon writhed in embarrassment. "Why bring that up—now?"

Jake Stone nodded to Patrolman Hand. "I didn't have no hand in that, neither. It was Eckert that called Headquarters twice because you cops hanging round made him nervous. He told Armstrong an' Armstrong said it was a swell idea. Wh-when you two turned up an' told me Eckert had just called Headquarters—to report a crime here—and him lying there dead—"

He shuddered and his face turned a dirty pale green.

"They made me answer the door. They was afraid whoever it was would keep ringing—raise a row—attract attention to the house before they could slide out."

Muldoon, bending over Armstrong, dragged out of his inside coat pocket a legal document with a bullet hole through it.

"A properly executed confession, all right," he said dryly, moving toward the telephone. "Executed is right."

"I'LL forget your lousy deductions and detective work if you'll tell me just one thing," John Hand said to his small partner fifteen minutes later as a police car came squealing to a halt in front of the house. "When you rang the bell I figured you were just going to tell Eckert that we knew he was lying about Armstrong not being around. But when the door opened you crashed in like you were certain murder'd been done inside. How was that?"

Patrolman Francis X. Muldoon stretched a hand out toward the bloodless countenance of Jake Stone.

"Take a look at that face," he said. "I had no clues, but with that pan staring at me through the crack—well, if that don't yell murder out loud then I don't belong in the detective division."

THE END

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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

HOCKEY triumphs for him:

Minneapolis, Minn.

"The Ship of Ishtar" started me on the ARGOSY eleven years ago. It was the best story of all time, in my estimation. For sheer gripping interest among recently published yarns, however, you can't beat that hockey story, "Flashing Blades," by Judson P. Philips.

The very title of your mag. gives me a thrill, every week. Once a week, an Argosy out of the East, with a cargo from all over the earth, ties up at my dock. One of my ships comes in!

ROBERT BUSHEY.

FIFTEEN years a George Bruce fan:

Newport, R. I.

The ARGOSY has taken a big step forward in signing up George Bruce, the country's best aviation story writer. Many of his best fiction efforts, after being printed in different magazines, were gathered and printed for a second time, by popular demand, as George Bruce's "*Aces.*"

His best story, in my humble opinion, was "*It Can Happen,*" in George Bruce's "Contact" last winter, '33-'34, in which New York, Washington, Boston, Chicago and other cities were destroyed (correct me in the title if I am wrong, George, as the book is still going around). This story gave food for thought for many people interested in this country's defense, and they all agreed that he had picked our vital and weakest spots.

As far as "Launch Planes!" is concerned, don't worry, Mr. Buckman. George knows his airplanes—and also our national defense. He is patriotic enough to bring home to us our dangers, and at the same time to give away no secrets.

Ever since I read my first Bruce story I have been a fan, and I believe before long the ARGOSY will be receiving hundreds of letters like this: "More George Bruce stories!"

A fan for fifteen years,

PARDON D. WATSON.

THE constant reader speaks:

New York City.

Your magazine deserves three cheers for the thrilling adventure stories which it gives to its readers. There is always a wild scramble for it as soon as it makes its appearance in our household.

It stands out, not only for costing so little, but also for being a weekly magazine. It certainly is disgusting to have to wait a month or so to continue reading a serial you've started. I'm sure the rest of the readers agree with me. Keep up the good work, and this family will continue to subscribe forever.

(MISS) PAULINE JANDA.

WHAT is *your* idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in ARGOSY since January 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which, in the opinion of the editors, give the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others, the magazine will reward the letter-writers with twelve full, yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you like best. Nor do we care about your literary style or skill. If there is some story that you liked so much that it stands out in your memory above all others, that is the story we want you to tell us about. It isn't necessary for you to read every story published in ARGOSY. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions if you read six of the stories published as you would if you read them all. But we must know *why* you liked the story you choose as best.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, *but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.*

Make your comments as long or as short as you wish, for mere length will not be considered. Put down all your reasons, however. Then address your letter to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than August 1st, 1935.

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ONE of ARGOSY's very best:

Gulfport, Miss.

The best story since January 1st? O. K.—"The Monster of the Lagoon," by George F. Worts. Reasons: 1. Action. 2. Unusual. 3. Humor. 4. Suspense. All of these things go to make up a good story. Worts, without doubt, is one of your very best writers. His descriptions are perfect; he paints a picture that makes you think you are witnessing the event itself. Print more of his stories, please. ROBERT H. POLLARD.

MR. TUTTLE rates "Tops":

Harrisburg, Pa.

This is the first letter I've ever written to any magazine, but I can't help handing a few orchids to ARGOSY. I've been a consistent reader for twelve years; I even used to swipe dad's *Argosy-Allstory* when I was a kid and sneak off to my bedroom with it.

Most of your stories are swell, though there are some bad ones.

Hashknife and *Sleepy* stories, and stories relating to the big timber, to fires, races and other sports, are my favorites. W. C. Tuttle's new *Henry* and *Judge* series is the TOPS, though. When I sit down and absorb the brilliant satire displayed by *Henry* and the *Judge*, I am really satisfied with ARGOSY.

If I could win a year's subscription it would be more valuable to me than a like amount of money! But if not, I'll still be spending my dime every Wednesday—and enjoying it.

Yours for good, wholesome fiction, and lots of it. I. M. KELLY.

FORTY years a fan:

Lincoln, Neb.

Many times I have thought of writing to you to express my appreciation of, and my delight in, the ARGOSY. I have been a constant reader for over forty years. I think the best story you have published since Jan. 1st is W. C. Tuttle's "Henry Goes Arizona." My second choice would be the same author's "With the Help of Henry." Both are well told; the characters are true to life, and are very human and lovable. The plot verges from the sublime to the ridiculous, with wit, humor, pathos, love and stark tragedy subtly blended. As I read, the characters became very real to me, and I was with them constantly. My impressions seemed to be a medley of laughter and tears. Long live W. C. Tuttle and his most human and lovable characters!

A forty-year ARGOSY fan,
T. J. MARSHALL.

LOOKING AHEAD!

HELL ISLAND

A smashing tale of filibusters and fighting fools.—They called him yellow, yet he wasn't afraid to battle the toughest outfit that island port had ever known. A long novelette by

EUSTACE L. ADAMS

AMATEUR DEVISES

There was no honor among those Western thieves—but they learned things about honor. A splendid short story by

WILLIAM FREEMAN HOUGH

YOU HAVE TO LEARN SOMETIME

It's pretty bad when a tough dick has to go to college to prevent a "snatch" job—and college life, as it turned out, wasn't all proms and football games and rah-rahing. A long novelette by

RICHARD WORMSER

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—MAY 11

A 6—4

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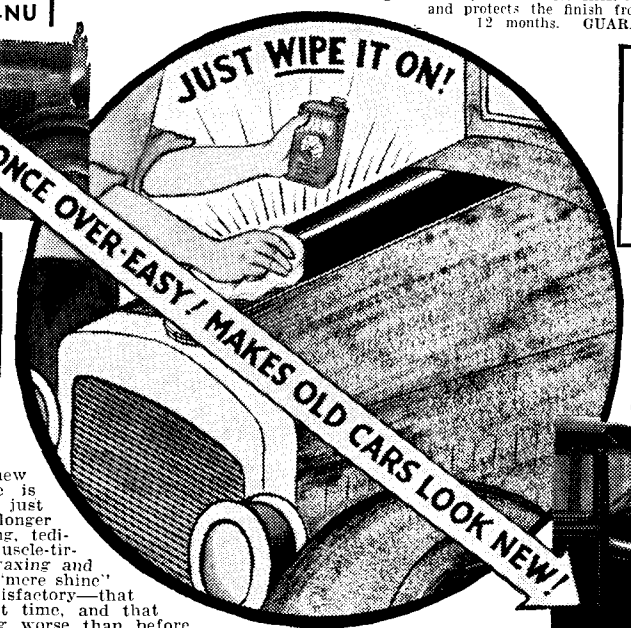

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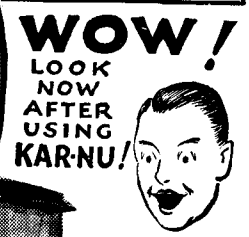

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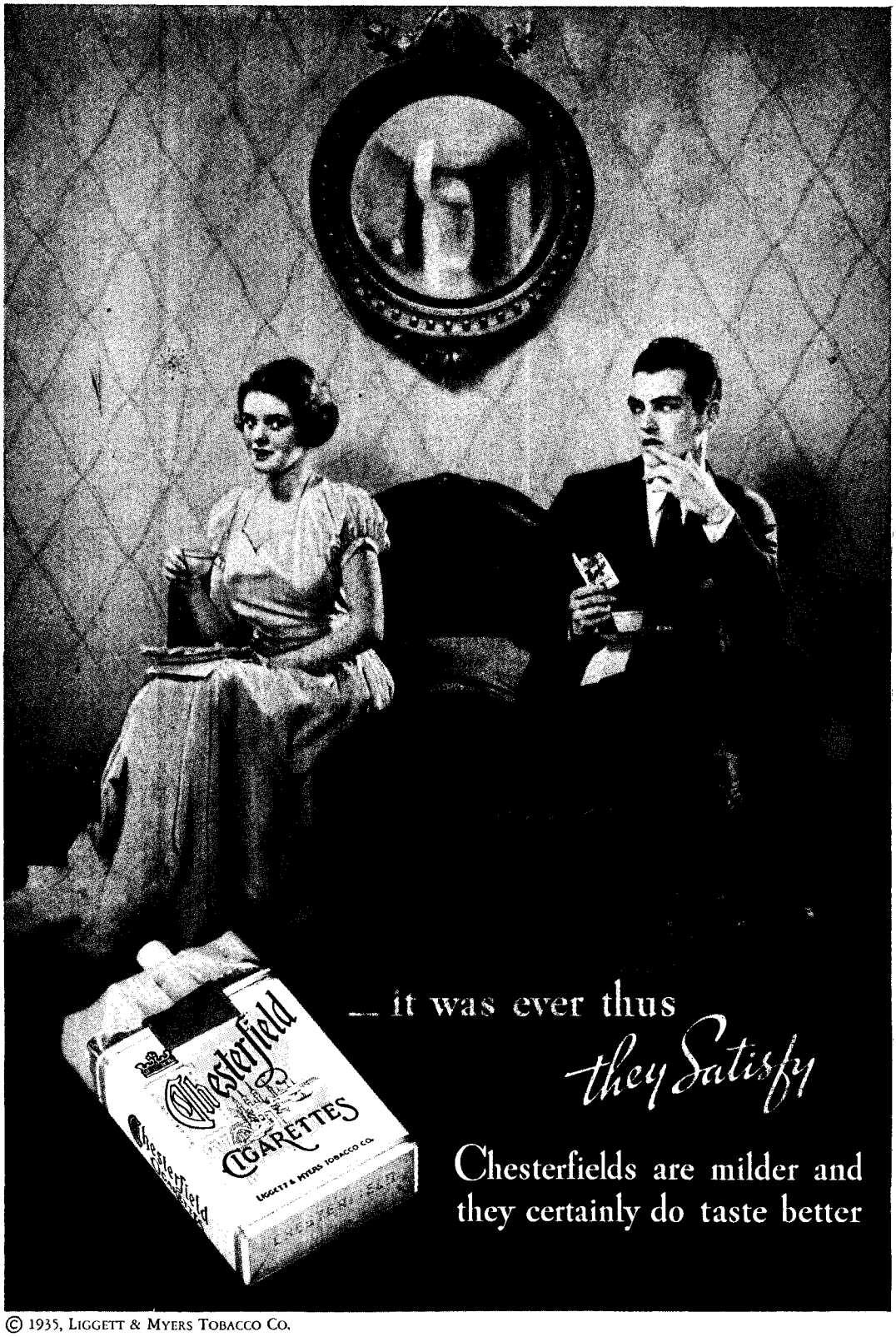

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